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WHERE THE LION TROD

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THE AUSTRIAN ODYSSEY

WHERE THE LION TROD

BY
GORDON SHEPHERD



With illustrations by John Verney

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1960

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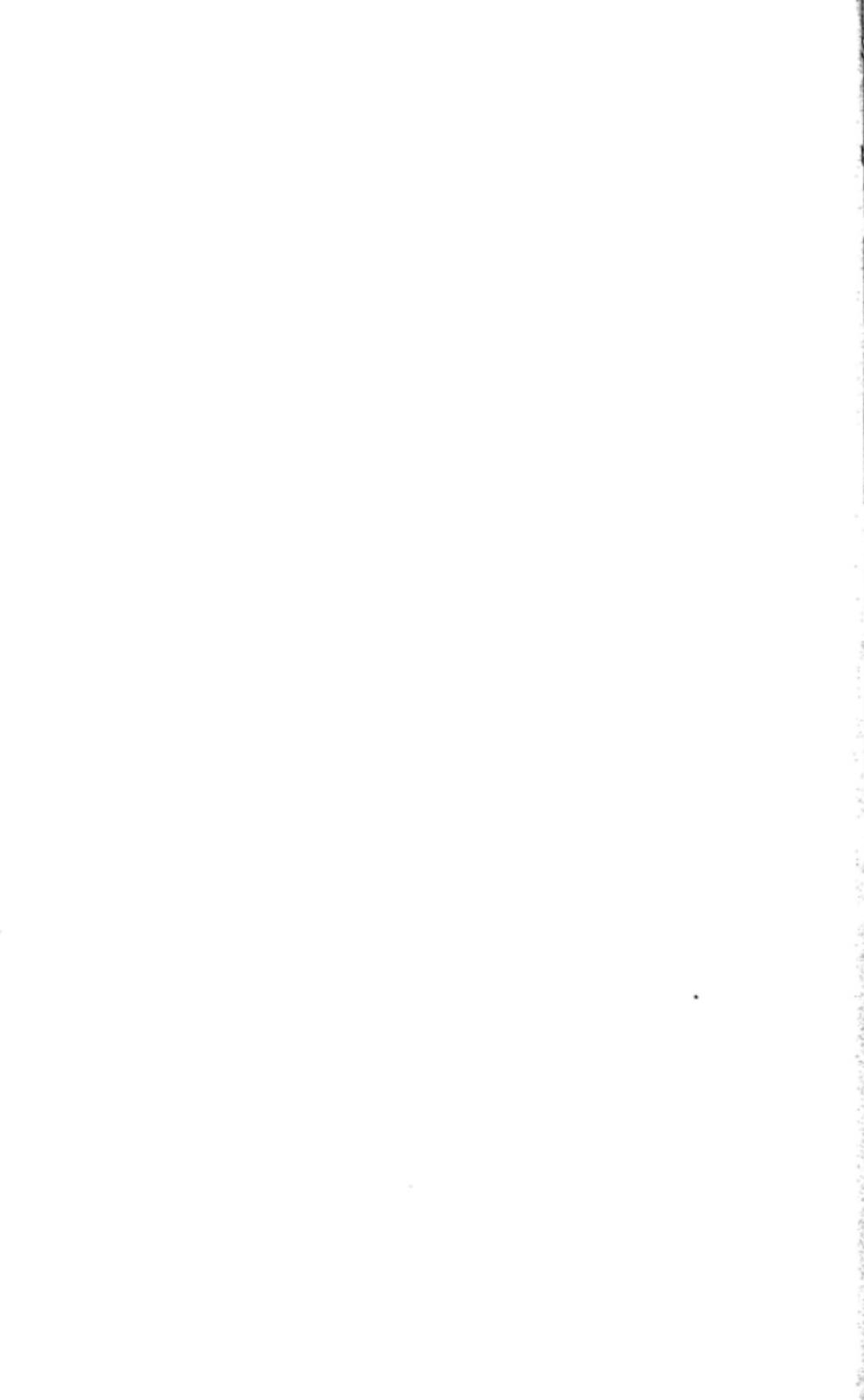
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To
ASHOK AND LEKHA MEHTA
part of the bridge between
old and new



FOREWORD

THIS is a light political travel book, written primarily to entertain. But even a clown must have a skeleton, and so I have built the chapters around one central theme : what have the British left behind them in India of enduring value ?

The question is a massive one, which serious scholarship alone can unravel. Indeed, the reader may well ask whether I am justified in mounting these weighty matters on such a slender framework. All I can reply is that they just climbed up there quite naturally by themselves and I hadn't the heart to dislodge them. True, there is no more authority behind any of the opinions I offer than that provided by one extensive but superficial tour of the sub-continent. These flittings by plane and jeep lasted a bare four months — about one-eighth of the average span of spare-time research spent on my previous books.

Yet, the more I talked to Englishmen of all ages in all corners of that vast country, the more it struck me that almost the only foreigners with any picture at all of India were those who had been there less than six months or more than twenty years. Both the curious newcomer and the disenchanted old-timer may well be wrong ; but at least they see an outline of sorts which seems denied to the in-betweens. Viewing the Indian scene is, in fact, rather like going through a long tunnel. For a few hundred yards after entering its mouth, you have enough guiding

light behind you to pick out its shape. Then, apart from an occasional flash, darkness and confusion take over, and the rails only begin to gleam again towards the end of your journey.

India in transition produces paradoxes at every turn, and I hope I shall not be taken amiss for having squeezed all the fun I could out of them. The country's problems are anyway too serious to be taken ponderously. There was, however, one group of the British in India — the business community — which I was sorry, through lack of time, not to have dealt with more scientifically. Instead, I would like to pay them a special tribute here.

Whether modern industrial combines in oil and steel on the plains ; whether old-established trading companies in Bombay, Madras and Calcutta on the coast ; or whether planting concerns in the hills, these enterprises and the men who run them have achieved feats of adaptation which can have few parallels in the story of the white man's relinquishment of Asia. Thanks to their own almost unaided feats of courage and character, they have remained, as they began, the real centres of British influence. In India, trade did not follow the flag. It went before the flag, and has now survived it.

GORDON SHEPHERD
(F. G. Brook-Shepherd)

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I

The Last of the Raj

THE tubby senior planter prepared to edge his car slowly round the sacred cow which blocked the already congested main street of Ernakulam. She had outstared the advancing chromium of the Buick with an insolence born of her centuries of inviolability, and she now sprawled, a soft but unmovable island, just in front of our bumpers. The highway through Ernakulam which leads away from the Arabian Sea coast to the inland mountains of Travancore is as narrow as it is crowded. Even before the bovine blockage came in sight, I could have almost touched the roadside bazaar stalls with a hand stretched out through the car window. But now, to avoid the animal, we literally had to mount the filthy pavement with two

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wheels and crawl through the maze of beaten brass, cotton bales, sweetmeats, fly-covered butcher's wares and slopping lemonade-jars which made up this part of the market.

Just as we bumped back onto the road, a dignified white-haired native with an office-clerk's pen behind his ear struggled past us, holding aloft a black umbrella to shield him from the sun. As he came level with the car, and looked in at its inhabitants, he carefully collapsed his brolly and lowered it till the ferrule rested between his toes, keeping it there while we moved beyond him, like a flag of mourning dipped in salute.

I noticed my companion stiffen in instant recognition. It seemed to me he was suddenly trying to look like Queen Mary in her 1930 Daimler — though the shirt-sleeves and the yellow Panama hat didn't help. But, by inclining the tip of his cigar without rupturing an inch and a half of ash, he managed to give a formal acknowledgement of sorts. When I looked back a few seconds later, the 'babu' already had his umbrella up again and was disappearing between the yellow lemonade-jars in the direction of Cochin.

There was clearly a comment coming, and it was not long before the planter started, in a reminiscent vein: 'Glad you saw that. In the old days, of course, no native would ever go past a white man with an umbrella up, or dare to ride past him on a bicycle. There was a Commissioner's wife here in the 'twenties who split her bearer's skull with the ivory stock of her riding-crop for failing to dismount as she cantered by. "Bloody Jane", we called her after that.'

'What happened?' I enquired.

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'Happened?' He seemed surprised at the question.
'Why, nothing. Taught the beggar a lesson, that's all.
We all thought it a bit drastic, of course, and afterwards
nobody used to go too near her at the club if she'd been
at the sherry bottle. But, for those times, she'd acted
quite rightly. Today, she'd be up before the magistrates
in five minutes, and her husband would most likely have
to resign. We're all supposed to be equal these days.'

'And our friend just now with the umbrella?'

'One of the old guard. There are a few left who still
look back, and who still look up. But not many. Come
to think of it, there aren't many white men of the old
type left for them to look up to.'

His cigar glowed once or twice before he added, with
an odd mixture of pride and sadness: 'In fact, we planters
are the last of the Raj.'

* * *

It was a splendid line, an epitaph spoken by the corpse-to-be at his own open grave.

Its truth one had seen for oneself all along the coastline of Travancore which was now dropping away behind us. The tea-leaf had replaced the laurel-wreath: where the ICS Collector and the Indian Army Colonel had once held sway, there was now only Brooke Bonds and Finlays. Yet they still saluted the flag that was gone. There was something more than commercial, for example, in the way these British tea-buyers would band together as best they could at the fortnightly Cochin tea-sales, trying to outsmart and outbid the Russian purchasers who had come down specially from the permanent Soviet Trade Mission

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at Calcutta with their heavy load of mistrust and black rupees. Though India had been for more than a decade a free Republic, I doubt if there was one old-established British tea-buyer present who did not still resent the intrusion of these foreigners in 'a British show', buying up the best chests the plantations had to offer to blend with the twigs they mowed off their bushes back in Georgia. And certainly the 'Snowboots', as they were affectionately dubbed, managed to look like foreigners. Despite their informal open-neck shirts and white drill trousers which the temperature of 90° in the shade demanded, they somehow stayed as heavily imposed on their surroundings as any fur-hatted sentry in Eastern Europe. For the British veterans at the auctions, these were the 'agents of Muscovy', and every bit as pernicious as their forebears who tried to stir up trouble for the King-Emperor along the North-West Frontier a hundred years ago. And the battle, though for tea-leaves and not border stones, was nearly as earnest.

Gleams of viceregal glory still stole gently too, I thought, across the croquet lawns and tennis courts of the British community's Cochin Club. The cosy pattern of the chatter and the downing of the evening 'chota-pegs' seemed here as smoothly unaltered as the rhythm of the Cochin fishermen who scooped the sea-shore with their traditional frame-nets just alongside. The old-fashioned planters and the old-fashioned fishermen asked for nothing more than to be left in peace; yet 20th-century India was creeping up fast on both of them.

It was one thing, however, just to sense this as an outsider, and quite another to hear it pronounced by one of

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the principal local actors of this tragi-comedy. We had some two hours to go before reaching the hill plantation centre of Munnar, where I had been invited for the weekend, and I determined to keep my host in his reminiscent vein. Fortunately the drive, once clear of the coastal belt, was conducive to confidences. We swished for mile after mile up a good mountain 'ghat' road, whose gradient of 1 in 20 (designed for the plodding bullock-cart) the Buick devoured contemptuously in high gear. And, as he drove and talked, the pattern of the planters' life unfolded before me ridge by ridge, like the pattern of the Travancore hills.

* * *

It appeared that planters, like everything else in India, were Not What They Were. With the new setting had come a new type — a product of the change, and an accelerator of it. A mere twenty years ago, the standard planter trainee had been the minor public school prefect — fond of games and men's company but not top-heavy with grey matter nor unduly sparked with ambition. Out in India, he lived on perpetually in the atmosphere of the school common-room. His prefect's badge on the plantation was his white face and his function was congenially similar: he either stroked the ebony heads or banged them together, as the state of his liver or of his company's dividends demanded. On his first home leave, he would get engaged to the brown-haired girl neighbour who thought the Orient was 'somehow different' (how right she was), and who anyway wanted to get away from it all in her father's Hertfordshire parsonage. On his second leave, he would marry her and bring her out to his

Assistant Manager's bungalow, a little patch of Hertfordshire carefully fixed like sticking plaster onto the shaved brown skin of the jungle.

And there, or thereabouts, he would stay for the next thirty years — tending his tea-bushes, sipping his whiskies and playing Rugger in forest clearings until retirement and the Bournemouth sea-front claimed him. By then he would probably have become a somewhat bloated or else a shrivelled caricature of his youthful self. The brown-haired girl, on the other hand, would be a well-preserved matron, spared by an army of servants from all the ravages of domestic life. Unlike him, she would drop back easily and gratefully into English life. The only marks of her thirty years on the plantation would be the heat lines on her face and that carefully refined articulation developed by those old-type 'Mem-sahibs' who felt vaguely that they were called upon to represent something in India every time they opened their mouths.

Theirs had been on the whole a pleasant life, and certainly a useful one, both for the community of their fellow-countrymen at home and for the native economy around them. But its dominant feature was its continuity in a fixed pattern. Planting with one of the big companies was not just a casual job but a favoured career.

Today, planting has ceased to be this favoured career for the simple reason that India has ceased to be British. The race privileges which once sweetened the most trying monsoon days with their hourly tribute of salaams and services are going. Pigmentation no longer protects the white man from the consequences of his harshness or his folly. What is much worse, it no longer guarantees him

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the fruits of his efficient labours. Indian taxes bear down heavily and unpredictably on balance-sheets and salaries. In at least one state of independent India — ex-Communist Kerala — the plantations have been kicked around like footballs in a local campaign against ‘capitalist exploiters’ which New Delhi was either unwilling or unable to check. Many small British enterprises have sold out altogether. And, one by one, the famous old firms are themselves crossing that commercial Bridge of Sighs which divides the ‘sterling company’ from the ‘rupee company’. Together with the privileges has also gone that security which made the privilege so potent. Instead of standing on what they thought was the rock of Empire, the British planters now stand on what they fear to be the quicksands of Asian nationalism.

It is not surprising that the new white recruits to this uncertain terrain are often lightweights with little luggage and a restless look. The typical British planter trainee of today is, in fact, the grammar school boy, as often as not a technician who feels more at home in a laboratory than in a labour brawl. He regards the plantation not as his life-home, but as an experimental staging point in his career as an international technocrat. Unlike his predecessor, he is professionally mobile, for, at the first sign of serious trouble, he can be back over his test-tubes in Manchester or off spraying crops in Kenya. He fits the British plantation of today as well as the prefect fitted the plantation of yesterday. But though he may stand among the same tea-bushes, he is no longer rooted with them. He means far less to India because India means far less to him.

Nor is this all. The main and long-term change is not

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so much the different type of British recruit but the dwindling of the white man altogether among the managements of the plantations. Even in the strongly Communist Kerala, it is Mother India rather than Father Marx who is tearing up the old softly-padded pattern of the planters' life. 'Indianization' on the tea, rubber and tobacco plantations has already absorbed much of the medium-grade staffs. The vast concern I was about to visit already had a handful of Indian Assistant Managers helping to run some of its estates. It could only be a matter of time before, with the advance in their own status and experience and the parallel thinning in the white men's ranks, they would be managing these estates themselves for their distant Edinburgh employers.

My host was full of nostalgia but remarkably free from bitterness as he forecast all this. He glumly admitted not only that it was inevitable, but that it was also turning out to be commercially satisfactory. The Indian official was often quicker and more industrious than anything available and willing in Britain. 'And after all,' he added in one splendid concession to the Republic of India, 'it's their tea and their land.'

By the time this introduction to the plantations of Southern India was over, the Buick had slewed round another hundred hairpins on the tarmac road. We were now 4000 feet up and still climbing steadily through the forest. The clamminess of hot and humid Cochin on the coast behind us had turned into cool, almost Alpine air. The darkness came with the suddenness of a tropical thunderstorm. Oil lamps began to gleam from the doorways of thatched houses on the jungle fringe. Twice we

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swerved to avoid the dark grey mass of an elephant, plodding back to its village along the roadside after a day's work with the lumber teams. The animals nosed their own way ahead and the coolies mostly trotted behind, carrying reed-torches for tail-lights. The tremendous chatter of the night jungle drowned the noise of the engine and the tyres. There seemed nothing to do but to stop talking and listen to it. And so, late in the evening, we arrived at Munnar, High Range.

* * *

At night, one had seen nothing but the outline of near-by hills and the dark wink of a river throwing back the lights of the club-house. But Munnar in the brilliant morning sunshine was an invigorating sight—a huge green bowl, topped all around by wooded heights and divided by a slow-moving river whose reeds and willows reminded one more of Southern England than Southern India. Nature could not have designed a better grass amphitheatre, and three generations of British planters had made the most of it. Tennis courts ran parallel to the drive-way. Next to them came cricket practice-nets and, beyond these, a nine-hole golf course with tolerable grass for the fairways and, for the putting, 'browns' of flat-pressed sand which broke through like sores on the body of the earth. In the distance, some two miles away towards the far side of the bowl, a circle of white railings denoted the High Range race-course.

The club-house was set on a rise at the tennis-court edge of this stadium, an elongated bungalow with out-buildings sprouting untidily from each wing and a blaze

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of bougainvillea over the porch. The porch itself, I noticed, had been presented by a grateful Indian in the pre-war era, presumably in return for some relaxation of the social apartheid of those days.

Inside, the club had the comfortable look of a sprawling English house meant to be lived in, combined with that uncomfortably empty feeling of a home which children have just left. Uncomfortable too was the impression that it was 'between lets'. In the dining-room, turbaned waiters offered roast beef and Yorkshire pudding under portraits of the Queen. But half of the members present — Indian Assistant Managers and their wives — tucked away at vegetable curry in a manner which suggested they still used the fork with reluctance (quite properly too, in this case; for curry, like fried chicken, tastes far better eaten with the fingers). The men — whether British or Indian — mostly wore the common professional badge of a tweed sports coat; but there was a strict division among the ladies between skirt and sari, and one sensed that this applied to other matters too. There was not the slightest hostility and not the slightest integration. Everyone seemed to have got used to the fact that they would never get used to it. The club bearers already had their formula to meet the situation. They called the old British members 'Master' and the new Indian members 'Sir'. I listened in vain for any difference in inflection.

The heart of the club was, of course, the bar. But it was a heart that evidently had great trouble in finding enough blood to pump, for the virtual disappearance of Scotch whisky had made a mockery of this Valhalla of Vat 69. The prices of European beer made the selection

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of bottled ales and lagers read like a connoisseur's wine-list. The younger members drank them, like champagne, for celebrations. Indian beer was plentiful and adequate, yet it somehow looked just as misplaced in these particular surroundings as the Indian member himself on the bar-stool.

For the Men's Bar of High Range Club, being the Holy of Holies, preserved for display all the sacred relics which this White Man's Temple had accumulated since its consecration. Of these, the sporting trophies which line the dark wood walls — the prize trout in glass cases, the heads of bison, ibex, roebuck, stag and leopard — are the lesser glories. More remarkable and more luxuriant by far is the unique display of hats hung on nails which frames the main alcove, like bosses on a shield. This sprawling cluster of human headgear includes brown and white topees, trilbies, sporting felts, pork-pies and even a black bowler. And on each dusty relic is painted the initials or nickname of its one-time owner and the dates during which he swigged and sweated on the tea plantations outside. Together they make up the arcana of arcana, Head-prefects one and all. A minimum of thirty years is needed for the liverish ceremony of 'hanging the hat', and even in these times of change and decay, the limit is rigidly adhered to. I was told of one aged Director and ex-High Range Estate Manager who exploded with fury, on revisiting the club, to glimpse a parvenu pork-pie hanging next to his own Edwardian topee.

'Take down that hat,' he screamed (in the tones of 'Take away that bauble'), 'I know for a fact the fellow did only twenty-nine years.'

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To listen to such a veteran as he gazes sentimentally at these trophies, when mellowed by the whisky he has brought down with him from Delhi, surpasses the best flash-back film of Hollywood. As his bleary gaze moves from hat to hat, each vanished head that once perspired under it seems to come to life:

'P. H. 1902-1934. Oh yes. Good old Phil. Retired just before the whisky got him. Doctor gave him five years. But still kicking. Fined in Weybridge last month for speeding.'

'J. H.-C. 1911-1943. Dour old Highlander. Bachelor and woman-hater, though I've no doubt he kept plenty of the local ones. Buried himself three hours away at the other end of the estate and played records in his bungalow every night. Rum chap, didn't often see him here, though he earned his place on the wall, of course. Ah well, no accounting for taste. Who's next ?'

'P. A. K. McD. 1904-1939. Ah, there's a chap for you. Rugger International. Coolies adored him. Wife left him. Splendid type.'

And so the verdicts rolled off, each summing up a British lifetime in this remote but pleasing bowl of hills: thirty years of drink and lonely despair for some, thirty years of good company and boyish enjoyment for others. And the bar, which had been their common denominator, was now their common cemetery.

This graveyard by proxy was to me more fascinating than any ordinary burial-place, for it was destined itself to

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die with its last inhabitant. None of the new grammar-school planters was likely to stay ten years, let alone thirty, and there were only about half a dozen of the pre-war vintage planters left in the area who could qualify in the next decade to 'hang their hat'. When the last of them had hung it up and chugged away forever down the ghat road to Coimbatore or Cochin, to catch his plane to Bombay and to England, this headgear cemetery would be incomprehensible, with no one to decipher the hieroglyphics.

Would the Indians preserve it, I wondered, like the bagpipes in their Army bands? Or would they dismantle it, like Queen Victoria's statue in Calcutta? Already, the dark-skinned members gazed at these human trophies with a mixture of awe and ridicule — a mixture quite feasible in an Indian. Only the native barman, a veteran of many 'hanging events', still regarded them fondly, with the unswerving wet-eyed loyalty of the colonel's batman. It was touching to picture him in the early 1970s, defending the sahibs' dusty topees nail by nail from the desecrations of an army of 'Sirs'.

* * *

The hats, of course, cease to be entirely ridiculous and become somewhat moving when one learns something about the collective struggle which the heads underneath them put up more than fifty years ago against disease, danger, hardship and bankruptcy.¹ The first planters came late in that long line of commercial pioneers who made

¹ For descriptions of early planting life which follow I am indebted to the privately published *History of the Uparsi*, and to personal reminiscences which were kindly passed on to me.

British India. But, on the personal plane, their achievements will stand comparison with the best exploits of the ships' captains of 'John Company's' days.

Not far from the pleasant golf course outside the High Range Club, for example, is the site of the first tea-estate ever to be planted in the Kanan Devan area. It was a 50-acre property started nearly seventy years ago near an ancient elephant road in the middle of nowhere by a hardy Englishman named Sharp. An aged Indian-Christian missionary who knew the estate in 1891 still survives to describe the scene:

'The place, called Parvathi, after the goddess of that name, was surrounded on all sides by jungle and was so infested with elephants and bison that no house, or line for the labourers, could be built without first digging a deep wide trench around the site. The buildings had stone foundations and pillars, with roofs of shingles, and walls of wattle and daub.'

'A regular pack-pony transport service to Devikulam and onwards to the plains and Bodinayakanur was operating, and this seldom broke down even in the heavy monsoon months. Death from exposure along the route was however only too common at that time of the year, and there were some who fell victim to man-eating tigers, turned such by old age or wounds.'

The evergreen jungles and the heavy deciduous forests of Southern India were, it seems, everywhere losing their virginity in the 1880s and 1890s before the onslaughts of other intrepid Sharps. The story of coffee planting is, for example, every bit as remarkable. The British can hardly claim to have first brought coffee into the area. This

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honour apparently falls to one Hazarat Shan-Jahab Allah Magatabi (commonly known as Baba Budan) who, at some unknown period in the 17th century, brought seven seeds of Mocha on his return from a pilgrimage to Islam and planted them in the garden of his house on Chandra Giri. But, after a gap of some two hundred years, the British had the prime share in spreading Baba Budan's seven beans all over Coorg, Madras and Mysore.

One of the most colourful of these 19th-century pioneers was Randolph Morris, who first brought coffee to the lovely Billi Girirangan Hills. Everything in this man's life breathes the spirit of adventure. The son of an Oxford parson, he ran away to sea at 18, and sailed twice round the Cape on a windjammer. He landed in India in the year of the great famine (1877) and, after eleven years' working on other people's estates, opened up his own coffee plantation on the slopes of the 'Billigiris' in 1888. He had discovered the area while on hunting expeditions, and his love for 'shikar' was to prove his fate. In 1895 he was terribly gored by a wounded bison, whose horn smashed through his ribs and clean removed one of his lungs. Friends rode night and day through the jungle down to the then railhead at Mysore to fetch a doctor, while Morris, breathing through a six-inch hole in his back, was somehow kept alive by his wife. He survived the ordeal a much-weakened man; but the bison caught up with him in the end. In 1918 he caught pneumonia and his one lung gave him no chance. The cause of the pneumonia had been — a chill caught while fishing. It is difficult to think of a more typical life and death for a British pioneer planter of the period.

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Indeed, he and his contemporaries brought their sports with them from England almost in the first rucksacks they humped, and they then proceeded to build the whole of their private existence around these sports. Reproducing the diversions of home both established their social title to rule in India and made that rule agreeable.

The dogged efforts which went behind this reproduction process were as remarkable as the results. The trek of the *Salmo irideus* or rainbow trout from the hatcheries of Britain to the land of the Sacred Cow is, for example, a saga in itself. The would-be anglers who arrived in the South Indian mountains a century ago found themselves confronted with a situation which Dante might well have devised as a special inferno for fishermen: perfect trout waters which had never seen a trout. In the words of one such pioneer enthusiast: ‘The high hills and shady valleys, plentifully supplied with gin-clear mountain torrents and larger rivers, but with never a fish to be caught, were a challenge to anyone who had ever known the feel of a rod’.

This challenge was taken up as early as 1863 on the Nilgiris (the adjoining range to Morris’s Billi Girirangans and probably where he went for his fatal trip) and around 1909 in the High Range area. For decades, thousands of bewildered trout ova splashed their passage in tanks from Loch Leven, from the Marquess of Exeter’s ponds in Burghley Park or from the more mundane waters of the Haslemere Trout Farm in Surrey, all the way by ship, rail and pony train to the jungle hills of India. Many a batch froze to death *en route*, and even more perished in the heat on arrival. But a few thousand hardy fingerlings

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survived, to be tipped in barrels from the heads of coolies into exotic streams like the Kundaly and the Othaparai. Their troubles were not over even then, for, like their masters, they apparently had to cope with native hostility. The first fully grown trout to work its way up the shallows of these particular waters was blown out of the river-bed by a terrified Indian tea-maker, who had never seen such a strange creature in his life.

But, with a few ups and downs, the descendants of these Victorian ova have flourished right down until today. Indeed, I had the pleasure myself of a day's fishing on one of High Range's best streams. The familiar tackle looked startlingly out of place, though somehow very reassuring, in these jungle hill surroundings, and I looked twice at the first trout netted to make quite sure it was not wearing a turban. Even for a visitor, brought on a good jeep road to the edge of the stream, it was a magic breath of Europe. How much more moving it must have been for those doughty anglers of the 'eighties, wading with their March Browns through a virgin jungle, a gun on the bank beside them as they cast to deal with any tiger or rogue elephant who might turn up with the evening rise. For them, on those long-vanished afternoons, all the bonds of Empire were surely held in a fly-box.

The tale of British Hunt Clubs in Southern India is no less indomitable. No greater contrast with the demure fields of Leicestershire could be imagined than this mountain landscape whose *sholas* are ablaze with wild rhododendron and strobilanthus. And the quarries matched the contrast in terrain. The records of the Ootacamund Hunt (formed in 1845), for example, show numerous occasions

when the hounds demolished black monkeys, civet cats, hyaenas and wild pig instead of the prescribed prey. Indeed, there was considerable hesitation as to what the prescribed prey should be. Foxes there were none, and not even these 19th-century pioneers ventured to import them like the trout. To begin with, sambhur and barking deer were hunted, but eventually the Joint Masters settled for jackal, which has remained the standard quarry down to this day. Even after these South Indian hunts had been 'regularized', however, there was nothing to prevent them turning, at a minute's notice, into a big-game shikar. A classic of the Indian hunting field is the Ootacamund meet of 1869 where the hounds went after a panther which had to be finished off by rifle-shot before the pack could be brought under control again.

Today, the dozen or so hunts of pre-war India are folding up one by one and only the inherited enthusiasm of Indian Army officers can keep going those which still survive. But, at least in Southern India, private gymkhana still flourish, and I was lucky that, during my week-end at Munnar, I was able to take part in one of these. All the horses were owned and trained by the planters and their wives, and most were owner-ridden.

It was a weirdly enjoyable experience. Proceedings began with a 'Handy Horse Competition'. A native audience from the village watched in silent awe — water-jars or banana clusters perched on their heads — while the competitors went through the cabalistic British ritual of riding through narrow pens and putting on raincoats while mounted. Perhaps they were less dumbfounded than they looked. There is no pageant too strange for a

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Hindu, and few ceremonies so exotic as to be disturbing. That quick obligatory dash of the Handy Horses to wet their forelegs in the near-by stream, for example, would obviously appear as an act of purification rather than of equestrian skill; as such, it would be quite familiar to a people whose greatest bliss is to immerse their families, animals and all, in the sacred waters of the Ganges. And the tent-pegging event ('Half-Sections with Sword or Lance') which followed might have passed as a ritual exercise of Shiva the Destroyer, transfixing the spirits of the earth.

At all events, the natives present were little more than a thin brown and black decoration for the railings. This was the planters' family affair, and all the serious business was enacted in the enclosure which held the car park, the announcer's stand, and the improvised Tote, saddling ring and bar. It was here that, between the Ladies' Plate and the Maharajah of Travancore's Cup, between shandies and sips of lemon tea, under a mixture of café umbrellas and thatch awnings, the white community of High Range assembled from their hundred distant bungalows. Company news was analysed, leave plans discussed, preparatory school reports were exchanged, and reputations were sliced up like salami. It was, in fact, a very British occasion.

And here, one felt, both the new and the old in the planting community came, for once, harmoniously together. For the older members of the English gentry or near-gentry, who fairly shone with bliss as well as perspiration, this was Paradise Regained. Leisure, servants, private horses, the illusion of power and privilege conveyed by the squeaking saddles and the flicking whips —

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this was the life that taxes in England had put forever beyond their grasp. And for the new-type planters, the denizens of semi-detached suburbia, this was Paradise Discovered. They — or at least their wives — seemed to revel in the feudal atmosphere which they did their best to foster in their conversation from collapsible chairs. Such as:

‘Of course, your ayah has been with you for years and that’s different. But mark my words, my dear, you will never get another. That type of servant is dying out here as well.’

Or, in best Earls Court English:

‘Have you seen Phil’s new butler? He’s a scream!’

It was a happy and successful day, and I was grateful to have lived it. The India of the white man had been re-created, almost perfectly, for a few hours. Almost: for the India of today announced itself twice, and each time unmistakably, during the afternoon.

The first occasion was when my host was reading out from his race card the riders in the Ladies’ Plate. In the middle of the recital of English names came an Indian one, a very Indian one, the sort of name that jangles like door-bells when one enters an empty antique shop.

I looked over to the paddock.

‘How interesting; which one is that?’

‘Number Seven — light blue with scarlet cap. Beautiful seat.’

I again scrutinized the paddock, examining Number Seven from the button of her scarlet cap to the admittedly beautiful seat of her light-blue silk breeches. A more unmistakable piece of suburbanized Home Counties would

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have been difficult to imagine. She positively exhaled the villages of the Guildford by-pass.

'But,' I protested, 'she's as English as you or I!'

'Heavens, yes, by birth, a daughter of Colonel Taplow. She married an Indian official of our Head Office a year or two ago.'

I didn't ask anything. With old-time planters, it never seemed to be necessary. Sure enough, he went on with a sigh:

'Extraordinary business. Twenty-five years ago I remember a young planter being drummed out of the club for marrying a local girl. Had to resign, of course. As for a marriage the other way round, that was simply inconceivable.'

But Number Seven looked to me very conceivable and quite relaxed and happy as she walked her mount round the paddock. I promptly put 20 rupees on her, as an offering to the New India. The offering evidently wasn't enough, for she galloped home next to last. Her cheeks were glowing and her hair was flying as if she had just thundered back from the South Downs.

The second reminder of reality came at the close of proceedings. The last race had been run, the last winnings paid out, the last shandies drained. The grooms were throwing blankets over the horses and leading them away. The planter-jockeys, ostentatiously stiff, were beginning to climb into their Vauxhalls and Morris Twelves.

From somewhere over the bowl of hills behind us, across the still evening air, I thought I heard the crackle of gun-fire.

'Only place it could be is Bison Valley,' said my

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companion who was lifting me back to the club, 'and that's quite a way off.'

'What's happening in Bison Valley?'

'Bad labour trouble. The Indian manager's fault. Damn fool hired a strong-arm squad to knock the natives together. Armed police started moving in yesterday. Quite a pitched battle by all accounts. Come and have a drink.'

And so we went back to the club-house, which was already ankle-deep in Indianization, and with the brown ground-water rising steadily higher. That night, throughout the festivities (the first break for food was bacon and eggs at midnight), the image of the mounting brown water somehow obsessed me. As everything began to swim anyway, this was perhaps fitting.

The flood, I felt, could stain the carpets, even set the chairs afloat without doing irreparable damage. The critical level was surely half-way up the walls, where the frames of fifty years of High Range sports photographs formed a last dotted line of defence. Once the waters climbed that far, the ship would sink, for these photographs were the battle pennants of the whole Munnar community.

Gazing at me from the billiard-room, I suddenly saw the man who had driven me from the race-track. Saw him, that is to say, thirty-one years ago. There he stood in the untroubled spring of 1927 — pink, fresh and slim, straight from his public school, and clutching the captain's rugger ball of his planters' team. In a daze only partly induced by the hospitality I was enjoying, I followed him down the years through library, reading-room, hall and ladies' bar. The fifteen, elevens, sixes and pairs told their own tale. He disappeared from the rugger pictures around

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1935. In 1936 and 1937 he was still among the 'flannelled fools' of cricket and tennis — already far more portly: a slow bowler and a dour lobber, one felt. By 1949 there only seemed to be golf left. Balding and greying, he stood with his foursomes partner on the last pictures, the flush of innumerable sundowners on his face. From here, he had just one more monument to come — that faceless effigy of the hats.

As I fell asleep an hour or two later, hats, photographs and cane chairs all seemed to be pitching restlessly on a brown torrent. Only Number Seven stayed erect and confident on her horse. She rode smiling through the wreckage, the foam licking at her silk-clad knees without staining them. This may or may not have been symbolic of the New Munnar. But it was a nice picture to take with one into oblivion of the Old.





2

The Battle of Tongues

THE man who had sworn to render the English tongue superfluous throughout the whole of India was waiting for me, as arranged, by the eleventh milestone on the road that leads southwards from Delhi out to the famous Qutb-Minar.

The largest minaret in the world, with its five tapering storeys of truncated cones, was a good back-drop against which to meet Professor Raghu Vira, Director of the International Academy of Indian Culture. For the Professor's self-appointed task — to translate the entire vocabulary of the English language into Hindi equivalents — was as elaborately monumental as that 13th-century stone

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colossus. Furthermore, there were already those who were asking why the Professor, like the Ghurid sultans and conquerors of old, had bothered to go to all that trouble.

What a labour it was he lost no time in telling me. 'There are about two and a half million words in English,' he said gravely when we were seated at his table inside the Academy. 'Most of these are of course scientific and technical, and anything up to 10,000 new words of this sort are being added to the language every year. But, by the time I die, I shall have dealt with the lot, and shall have left my people a complete, up-to-date tongue of their own.'

The Professor seemed a little behind schedule, as he was then 56 and had only coped with a mere half-million words in the twenty-five years he had already been at it. But a look into the smouldering brown eyes of this Stakhanovite among philologists convinced one that anything was possible in the further twenty-five years of working life he reckoned to have in front of him.

The table groaned under the load of some of the Hindi-English reference books he had completed so far: *A Glossary of Logic; A Dictionary of Indian Mammals; A Dictionary of Mineralogy; Hindi Conventional Signs; A Dictionary of Indian Birds*; and so on. As I dipped into them, he explained his method.

Though selected as the future lingua franca of the whole sub-continent, Hindi was, he admitted, a relatively undeveloped language, with restricted roots and a limited range of expression. The richness and variety it lacked the Professor was trying to provide by transplantations from Sanskrit, the classical tongue of India. This, according

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to him, could boast as many derivatives as Greek and Latin combined.

Thus the hundreds of thousands of new words which were filling his dictionaries one by one were, in fact, synthetic concoctions of Sanskrit roots, transposed into the officially recognized Devanagri script of Hindi. It was like a gigantic laboratory experiment in the anatomy of languages — a tongue centuries dead but still virile being rifled to give vitality to a tongue living but weak. The terrible misgiving at once assailed my layman's mind that this was surely language-making in reverse. Instead of the spoken words and those already current in literature being alphabetically codified, the Professor's creations first saw pronunciation and printer's ink in the dictionary itself; and the question arose whether most of them would ever be recognized, let alone put into use, anywhere outside its pages.

Despite this reservation, however, some of his technical manuals seemed to have achieved far greater order and precision than the English originals, partly because these were themselves sorely in need of revision. A good example of this was his *Birds of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon*. The old handbook had been compiled under the guidance of the amateur ornithologists of the Raj and was coloured by the fact that, in many cases, they or their friends had discovered the birds they described. The result was something as warmly personal as a rose catalogue, and just about as unscientific.

The Professor, with his terrible Sanskrit sword, had liquidated the whole of this 19th-century army of British bird-watchers, who had once made the bushes tremble

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with their vigils all the way from Cape Comorin up to Simla. Indian place-names replace the English gentry, and the result, though less picturesque, is undeniably a lot tidier. Thus 'Baker's Rufous-necked Scimitar Babbler' becomes simply the 'Assam Sweet Speaker'; 'Sharp's Babbler' becomes 'Skulker from the Chin Hills', and two more links with Empire are severed.

So far, so good. But I could not help feeling that the nearer the Professor moved to the realm of everyday speech or even semi-technical vocabularies, the shakier was the ground on which he trod. This did not, of course, stop him from treading it with equal confidence and fervour.

The best illustrations of this were to be found in one of his major books to date, the *English-Hindi Dictionary of Administrative Terms*. Unlike most of his undertakings, which were 'privately financed', this was partly sponsored by the Indian Government, being designed as a guide for the Republic's new Civil Servants to all the special terms they might encounter in their work.

It had 160,000 entries and was like a Turkish cannon-ball to lift. A similar heaviness was discernible in some of the renderings. A 'Press Conference', for example, appeared somewhat quaintly as 'a coming together of paper-men'. The word 'emergency' was even more strangely translated as 'a falling down (of something on something)'.

But the weirdest things of all seemed to happen to British political terms, which had been quite familiar as they stood to generations of educated Indians. Some of these were literally unrecognizable in their Sanskritized Devanagri garb. The political term 'constitution'

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emerged as 'the law which harmonizes all other laws'. The Parliamentary figure of 'Mr. Speaker' became 'Highly raised Above-Eye'.

Such contortions showed where the shoe was pinching. These words, and thousands like them, were untranslatable because the concepts they expressed were unknown in the native language. All the roots of Sanskrit put together could not embrace something which had never been planted in the soil of ancient India. On a lowlier plane, one felt that the same trouble would arise when all the handbooks for social and sporting terms came to be written. Surely, even the formidable Professor would meet his Waterloo when, some time before his retirement in 1980, he tried to list a complete set of golf clubs in Sanskrit.

It should be noted in passing that these English-Hindi labours, gargantuan though they were, represented only part of the activities of this remarkable man. He was striving to be the Doctor Johnson of Asia as well as of India. Under his guidance, work was also going on in the Institute preparing basic dictionaries and grammars for the Mongolians, the Tibetans, and the Buryats and Kalmuks of Eastern Russia. The Russians had allowed him to go to the Buryat Republic and micro-film all the material he wanted; the Chinese Prime Minister Chou en-Lai had presented him with eight tons of ancient Chinese and Tibetan scrolls to process. The smell and crackle of all this remote learning, carted down to Delhi from the roof of the world, filled the nostrils and the ears as we moved around the work-rooms.

Indeed, under the slogan 'Sata-Pitaka' or 'Hundred

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'Basketfuls', he was striving to revive and collate the whole of classical Indo-Asian literature in one integral cultural complex. From Afghanistan, Khotan and the Valley of the Oxus down to Cambodia and Indonesia his researches stretched — collecting palm-leaf manuscripts, xylographs, paintings and estampages of inscriptions.

His family, whom he appeared to rule with a quill of iron, were all coping with one Basket or another. At one point in our tour of the premises, an agreeable hollow-eyed man in early middle age joined us respectfully. 'My son,' said the Professor. 'He has completed the first comprehensive Tibetan-Sanskrit Dictionary. He went to Lhasa, Peking and Leningrad for the material.'

Used to almost anything by now, I merely asked whether I might purchase a copy as a souvenir. It was a disastrous remark, as if I had asked for a stick of Blackpool rock to take away.

'The work will run into twenty volumes,' replied the Professor coldly. 'The first will appear next year.'

After that, I contented myself with nodding until our tour of the premises ended.

All these academic romps into the Mongolian, Kawi and Balinese of old were exciting enough in their way. But it was Professor Raghu Vira's role in the massive Hindi versus English conflict in the India of today which still struck me as the most significant. When he led me out to the main road again after a two-hour visit, the sun was slipping down fast behind the Qutb-Minar, and car-loads of tourists who had visited the minaret in the cool of the evening were returning to Delhi.

Would the Professor's Institute appear like this to future

generations — a preposterous monument in the desert, to be photographed as a curio and left? Or was the voice of a new nation being trained inside those learned walls? As there is probably no single domestic issue of more significance for India's future, and certainly none which so intimately involves the British tradition, it is worth exploring a little into the legal and political background of the Professor's labours.

* * *

The Indian Constitution of 1950 laid down that Hindi should replace English as the official language of the Union by 1965; and though it was later accepted that a transition by that particular date might well prove impracticable, the plan as such still stands. By 'official language' the law-makers meant the medium of expression for the top-level administration of the Republic — posts, railways, telegraphs, customs, High Courts, and other all-Union matters such as inter-communication between the governments of the various states. There is no legal basis for propagating Hindi as the 'national language' of India. The same constitution formally elevated fourteen of India's thousands of tongues to this status (including, of course, Hindi, but excluding English); and it is one or more of these accepted 'national languages' which the different states already use to conduct their own administration and to instruct in their own primary and secondary schools.

Yet, despite this distinction, the controversy is as much nationalist as technical. The 'Hindi ever, English never' school have basically only one argument, but it is a

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thoroughly jingoistic one: India cannot achieve full nationhood so long as the Republic itself continues to talk in a 'foreign tongue'. Hindi has the largest following of all the major languages of the sub-continent, therefore Hindi is the natural successor to English as the voice of governmental higher education.

This argument is developed to meet social as well as patriotic aspirations. English, it is claimed, is the tongue of the British-trained 'Establishment', who owe much of their present supremacy in the bureaucracy to the simple fact that they talk this tongue with perfect fluency. Such Westernized Indians are accused of being a race apart from their countrymen, with an outlook on life still based on that of their former Imperialist masters. India, it is argued, can only become a true democracy, with careers open to talents, when this English-speaking clique of Civil Servants are displaced from their swivel-chairs and high stools. And the chosen instrument to achieve this conversion is the Hindi tongue.

The pro-English school, which is led by but not confined to the present inhabitants of these same swivel-chairs, directs its fire against two points: the inadequacy of Hindi as an official medium, and the disruptive dangers of any attempt to 'impose' it on the Union at large.

Their technical objections are formidable and are accepted, for the moment, even by the opposition. Hindi, though the most widespread of India's languages, is still only spoken by some 42 per cent of the population, and this with differing degrees of fluency and considerable corruptions of local dialect. The Moslems will mix it with Persian and Arabic idioms, and even among its

Hindu speakers, the man from Bihar will often have trouble in making himself clear to the man from Uttar Pradesh. It is, in fact, akin in its growth to Urdu, that common tongue evolved in the military camps of the Moghul Emperors which once straddled Northern India from Delhi to Dacca.

Because of this, the counter-argument runs, Hindi is imperfect and unwieldy as a language. Despite its great classic, the Ramayana, it is held inferior in wealth of literature to many other major tongues of India, and notably to Bengali, Marathi and Punjabi in the North, and Tamil and Telugu in the South. Thus — the reasoning concludes — to clamp down this somewhat crude and stiffly-jointed language frame over the whole delicate apparatus of Indian Government would, at the least, damage that apparatus and could, at the worst, bring it to a temporary breakdown. Similarly, to substitute the Professor's Sanskritized Hindi for English in the Universities and Technical Institutes of India would be to throw the whole intellectual and scientific life of the country twenty years back in its already desperate race for progress.

The force of both these arguments was brought home to me by my own travels. In Bihar Province, an Indian official told me of a significant 'battle of files' which had just been concluded with the authorities in neighbouring West Bengal. Correspondence had opened between the two states on a complicated point of Agricultural Law. Bihar started off in Hindi and West Bengal replied in English. The matter got more and more involved and West Bengal pleaded with Bihar to go over to English (which all its senior officials anyway mastered) because

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many of the Sanskritized inventions they were using for the technical terms were simply unintelligible. Bihar refused and the confusion steadily became worse confounded. Finally, the authorities in Calcutta could stand it no more, and started at their end minuting all the files in Bengali.

'At that point,' my Bihar friend admitted ruefully, 'we gave in and went over to English. And, I must admit, we were able to reach agreement a week later.'

The interesting thing about the incident was that Hindi had proved unsuitable for this exchange of ideas not because either side had failed to master it as a language, but because the English tongue seemed the only intelligible medium for discussing what was still English legislation. If the medium is removed, the administrator can no longer go on thinking in the same way. That may well be a deeper aim of the Right-Wing Hindi fanatic, to whom Gandhi's village spinning-wheel means more than Nehru's Bakhra power dam. But this aim involves nothing less than the dismantlement of the mind as well as the government of India in its post-Independence form. What would survive in practice of the concept of 'fair play' after a generation of Indians had been calling it 'equitable deportment'?

The indispensability of English in the cultural and scientific fields for the foreseeable future seemed equally unchallengeable. Since the 17th century, English has been not merely the language of authority in India; it has also been the language of civilization and progress. It is through that tongue alone that the Indian of today can understand Newton or Shakespeare, Einstein or Eliot, can fly a plane, mend a fuse, make a film or remove an

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appendix. To the nationalists who protest that such culture, however worthy, is alien and unwanted, the additional point can be made that it was only through English that the Indians got a coherent picture of themselves. The first general histories of India and the first proper maps and censuses of the sub-continent were all made under British rule. The paths of the invader were also the avenues of enlightenment, even if these avenues may have been unduly screened.

Today, as one Indian University professor put it to me, this Western heritage, on its Anglo-Saxon side, might be visualized as the ten million volumes which the British Museum and the Library of Congress house between them. The habits of three centuries cannot be broken in a decade, and it is on these ten million volumes that the mind of India still rests. Yet only a few blocks of this Great Pyramid of learning exist in Hindi transcriptions. And, even more important to the young Indian than these great stones of literature are the pebbles which pile up underneath them every day — the ceaseless output of scientific manuals and journals which record the world's technical march. This is also basically an English-language output, and it overhauls itself at such speed that periodicals would be out of date long before they could be popularly digested in any Sanskritized form.

Politically as well as culturally, the Hindi movement has its dangers. Indeed there are some — like that Grand Old Gadfly of Indian politics, Mr. Rajagopalachari — who maintain that, so far from ‘unifying the Indian nation’, the imposition of Hindi would split it asunder. The Gadfly was unfortunately ill with influenza when I

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passed through Madras, so I had to get his views second-hand from his local followers. They were a potent mixture of Western logic and Dravidian mysticism.

These 'Southern rebels' advance all the practical arguments outlined above in favour of retaining English as India's official tongue. But underlying it all is that feeling of anti-Hindi separatism still strong among India's millions who live below the Bharatavarsha. Of all the varying political moods I encountered in India, I found this one the most fascinating to pursue, and the most impossible to capture.

Its emotional roots stretch deep into the past, to be lost in unchronicled history. The Southern Indian prides himself in an idle sort of way on being the aboriginal of the sub-continent, the descendant of that dark-skinned Dravidian race which was driven down from the Ganges Valley by the fair-skinned Aryan invaders some two thousand years ago. There is considerable ignorance as to how and when this happened, and a typically Indian vagueness as to what precisely these Dravidians were. If this is the spring of purely Indian blood and culture, it is a spring which has yet to be traced back to its source. There are virtually no dates, no heroes and no literature. The beginning is a legend, wrapped in mist.

But, like many another such racial legend (that which sustains the Macedonian people, for example), the tradition is all the tougher for being tenuous. And, on top of this mystical sense of distinctiveness which the Southern Indian undoubtedly has, come several more tangible factors. There is the dislike of the Tamil for the Hindu as such; there is the jealousy and suspicion which the more old-

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fashioned agricultural South feels for the more sophisticated and industrialized North. A plantation atmosphere and mentality reign over wide areas here, akin to that of the Southern American states a century ago. (Indeed, the Government Secretariat in a town like Trivandrum — columned, cool and spacious — would still pass for a Kentucky mansion.) The estate-owner's contemptuous fear of the factory-owner is coupled with the peasant's aversion to the 'city-slicker'.

The Hindi versus English dispute has now become the open tug-of-war for all these latent tensions and has shown how strong the pull still is at the Southern end of the rope. It has revived, in its crassest form, the cry of 'Northern exploitation'. Whether it wishes to or not, this Southern campaign to retain English as the sole official tongue of the Union thus joins hands with Southern separatism in all its variants. These include a movement to create an independent Tamil state peopled only by the Tamil-speakers of the sub-continent; a movement for a larger and wholly autonomous Dravida Nadu, to include Andhra, Kerala and Karnataka as well as Madras; and even a wild scheme for linking the Tamil areas of Southern India with those of neighbouring Ceylon to form one separate linguistic state. All these varying factions agree on three things only: to resist the 'imposition' of Hindi; to rule and educate themselves in their own tongues; and to continue talking to each other from state to state in English. Even 'Rajaji', when reproached in Delhi for associating himself with these 'extremists', defended his right to march with them on the language issue, whatever he felt about their political views.

* * *

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It would be a brave man, and a rash one, who would be confident about the outcome of India's great linguistic tussle. My own guess is that, with fourteen native languages being developed and pushed vigorously in the different regions of the sub-continent — some at direct odds with each other and all suspicious of upstart Hindi, the Court Favourite, English stands a very fair chance of slipping through unchallenged, past 1965 and far beyond. In this Tower of Babel the old call of the muezzin is likely to survive for two reasons: first, because it is familiar; secondly, because, being non-Indian, it is becoming to some extent *hors de concurrence*.

One vital condition, however, is that the level of English scholarship itself in India is not allowed to slip. A good step in the right direction in this field was the creation in 1958 of a British Language Institute in Hyderabad (a joint Anglo-American venture), to ensure that those Indians who go out to teach the English language and literature in the schools and universities of the sub-continent should learn these subjects in the first place from English instructors. Far more, however, remains to be done. It was anguishing to hear of Indian universities, with ten thousand students or more, appealing in vain to the British Government to send them professors out from England to fill their vacant English chairs. In most cases these appeals were being turned down through lack of funds in the Commonwealth's overall cultural budget. One could not help wondering how much Moscow would pay for a similar golden opportunity to implant its language and culture among India's rising generation.

I would not like to suggest that any amount of

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instruction could or should turn India's 400 millions into an English-speaking sub-continent, or even bring a complete command of the language to that Westernized minority who speak it after their several fashions already. The world would indeed be a duller place if this happened. For generations, the near-perfect English of the educated Indian has had its place of honour next to mothers-in-law as one of the stand-bys of Anglo-Saxon humour. I found myself, almost unconsciously, looking out for prize specimens on my travels, as one scours the mountain pastures with half an eye for gentian when walking in the European Alps.

For months I discovered nothing really worth preserving. Then, as often happens, I stumbled across two, on the same day and within a stone's-throw of each other. Both were inscribed on letting-boards for house-boats tethered to the shores of the Dal Lake in Kashmir. In both cases, a mistake of one single letter had proved disastrous to the whole sense but sublime in every other way.

The first legend read: 'H.M.S. Pinnafore. For immediate hire. Fully flushed sanitation.'

And the second: 'Ark Royal: Bears, Wines and Spirits.'

I have still not decided which to cherish the most: the somehow appropriate hint of lightning in the thunder-boxes of 'H.M.S. Pinnafore', or that cosy picture of an Abominable Snowman's bottle party on board the 'Ark Royal'. But I do feel most strongly that these are not just linguistic blobs. They are a tongue unto themselves, and long may its magic be heard. Even to preserve this English of outer bull's-eyes, however, more archery lessons are urgently required.

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The eventual survival of English in the present linguistic *mélée* might be an informal process, brought about simply by repeated postponements of the original Hindi take-over date. But it could be the result of special legislation. A movement has already started in Madras for the so-called 'bilingual solution' — that is, the enthronement of Hindi and English as the joint official tongues of the Union. The proposal has the great merit of moving from practice into theory, instead of from theory into practice. For there is at least one Union preserve where these joint languages can already be found, nestling cosily side by side — the Telephone Directory.

There is a fascinating page in the introduction to the Delhi issue which is devoted to 'Stock Phrases for Greetings Telegrams'. It shows a happy juxtaposition of English and Hindi in parallel columns, and much else besides. Indeed, the twenty standard greetings listed here pick out, between them, most of the main strands of Indian life. The Hindus have their 'Diwali' and 'Holi' greetings (Nos. 1 and 20); the Moslems have their 'Id Mubarik' (No. 2); and the Christians have their 'Merry Christmas' (No. 9). Depending on your enthusiasm for the present regime, you can either send a restrained 'All good wishes for Independence Day' (No. 18) or go the whole hog on Number 19 with 'Long live the Republic'. Similarly, a choice of two emotional layers is offered in greeting newly-weds. Number 8 gives the flat Western formula of 'Best wishes for a long and happy married life'. But, for no extra charge, one can have the more ornate Oriental version of 'May Heaven's choicest blessings be showered on the young couple' (No. 16).

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Perhaps the most characteristic reflection of the new, upsurging India is the fact that no fewer than four of these twenty greetings deal with congratulations for some personal advancement — including those for ‘the distinction conferred upon you’ (No. 7); for ‘success in the Election’ (No. 12); and, inevitably, for ‘success in the Examination’ (No. 10).

Altogether, this mundane page of instructions unwittingly gives about as good a cross-section of India today as anyone could consciously compose in as many words. And, when the Republic reaches in fact the same degree of all-round co-existence which its twenty stock Telegram Greetings convey on paper, it will be well on the way to nationhood.





3

Driftwood

THIS particular problem I first approached, quite literally, from behind. On arriving late one evening at a Kalimpong hotel, I was kept back from the reception desk for fully five minutes by a little brown gentleman with a large brown family who took an eternity to register his particulars. When he had finally moved on upstairs, amidst a caravan of hand-grips, wicker-bags and bed-rolls, and I could get to the desk myself, I noticed that, under the 'Nationality' column, he had written in a firm and flourishing hand the word 'Anglo-Indian'.

He was, of course, a citizen of the Indian Republic;

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and had been for well over ten years. He carried its passport, demanded its protection, elected its rulers, evaded its taxes and behaved generally like any other of its 400 million inhabitants. But an hotel registry brought him down to social bedrock. Like that other Indian who, after long thought, entered 'Occasionally' under the 'Sex' heading, he was determined to make things quite plain to the receptionist.

As I soon discovered, what he was describing was a great deal less firm and flourishing than his handwriting would suggest. The Anglo-Indians, or persons of mixed European and Indian blood, are the most diffuse of India's communities — understandably so, since they have been scattered over the sub-continent wherever their father's eye happened to gleam. The common descent they all claim is less of a bond than might be imagined, since it is proven in some cases and only charitably assumed in others. Hundreds of the original community have managed to establish their United Kingdom parentage at some point back on the father's side; thousands more could offer the authorities nothing more solid to go on than the personal assurance that their father was a British Army corporal or sergeant who served in Jubbulpore in 1932.

It is the same with their common portion of white blood, which sets them apart from the natives more emphatically than it binds them together among themselves. Some are demonstrably 50 per cent pure Dorset, and have complexions like a dish of clotted cream with only a spoonful of coffee in it. Others are as black as boot-polish and their 'European blood' probably amounts to a thimbleful traced back to a Portuguese sailor who landed on the

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Malabar coast from one of Albuquerque's ships over three and a half centuries ago.

Yet, black or creamy, pedigreed or non-pedigreed, they mostly have three things in common: the English language, the Christian religion and a fierce pride in not being 'native'. The fierceness of the last factor has the strength of an amalgam. The Anglo-Indian belongs neither to Britain, India nor the Orient. Yet his pride is a laminated blend of suburban self-respect, Hindu caste-consciousness and Asian face-saving. How does it stand up to the India of today?

For part of the answer I went, when next in Delhi, to Frank Anthony, who, with the resounding title of President-in-Chief of the All-India Anglo-Indian Association, is the acknowledged head of the community. He turned out to be a brisk, burly lawyer-M.P., and an Anglo-Indian of the lighter hue, with just that suggestion of native blood which used to be rudely described as 'a touch of the tar-brush'. He lived in a modern apartment which had European easy-chairs and a whisky decanter as well as Indian carpets and ornaments. The street outside used to be called 'Kingsway' and had now been renamed 'Janpath' or 'People's Way'. Sensibly enough, Mr. Anthony had moved with the times. He gave me a survey of the Anglo-Indian problem which was practical, unemotional and encouraging.

He put the size of his community in the India of today at about 200,000 (the official census figures, which gave 110,000, were 'far too low'). The total when the British left India was nearer to 350,000. The remainder had emigrated, 'mostly to Britain or to Australia'.

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Was it true that, generally speaking, it was the fairer-skinned or more capable who had left India, leaving behind the darker or duller specimens?

'To some extent that is certainly true, and an even bigger problem is the percentage of aged and infirm Anglo-Indians who have remained. For this and other reasons, we have about 20 per cent unemployed in the community as a whole. But the 80 per cent who are working include some very distinguished men. Many of them in the Civil Service are now Heads of Departments — a rank quite unthinkable for them under the Raj. The Armed Forces, and especially the Army, are full of Anglo-Indians filling responsible positions at grades just below the top.' (Here he became rather like a horse-trainer, running through his stable favourites.) 'I have six Brigadiers on the Army List now and, with normal promotion, at least four of them will soon be Major-Generals: again, that is something that could never have happened in the British time!'

Did India trust people whose racial and emotional roots were partly in Britain?

'Now, I think, yes. The Kashmir campaign, which is the only major action we have fought to date, was largely officered, at unit level, by Anglo-Indians. They were loyal to a man to the Government of India and that made a deep impression. The only difficulty which could arise is if tension developed between Britain and India. Then, the Anglo-Indians would be well and truly on the rack, and I don't know which pull would prevail. But that situation, I hope, will never arise. We have certainly not the slightest ground for complaint on domestic grounds.'

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Our treatment in India is not only fair but privileged. Grants are still being given to our English-speaking schools. Places are reserved for us in the administration and the services. And our guaranteed representation of two members in the Lok Sabha is far more than our numbers would justify. There is, of course, plenty of hardship in our community. But that is the hardship of India which they share.'

In this case, was there any serious cause for concern?

'Yes, indeed,' came the reply. 'There is this problem of language. If Hindi drives out English in India, it would spell ruin and disintegration for the Anglo-Indian community. At the moment, English is still technically a foreign tongue in India, and our aim is to get it added to the fourteen other tongues already listed as the official languages of the Constitution. Though we must all think and feel as loyal Indians, we intend at all costs to preserve our own English culture; and this can only be done by preserving the English tongue.'

It was odd to think of the language of Shakespeare fighting the sort of survival battle one normally associates with Ruthenian or Gaelic. But that is one of the endless paradoxes of India today. English is not only the disputed though still supreme official medium for the whole sub-continent. It is also the tongue of that sub-continent's smallest minority.

* * *

'It is the hardship of India which they share.' Down in steamy Madras a few weeks later I got an unexpected glimpse of what that meant for the thousands of bottom-

drawer Anglo-Indians — the aged and doddering, the infirm and inbred. They would never be Brigadiers in the Army of the Republic. Most were too frail or soft-minded even to fill one of those lowly sinecures in the railways or the postal services which the Government reserves for its weaker brethren. ('Two posts as Bridge Inspectors vacant, one reserved for Anglo-Indians and one for Tibetans of Spiti and Lahaul or other backward classes', one such announcement ran.) These destitute Anglo-Indians of Madras were not even capable of watching a bridge; yet they were equally incapable, because of that fateful admixture of European blood, of slipping right down into the smooth beggars' bowl of India. It was only 'the natives' who made a vulgar parade of their poverty. Thus this wretched community of the Anglo-Indian down-and-outs (and there were bigger ones in Calcutta and Bombay) stood between two worlds — the white man's regime which had walked out, and the Indian regime which their infirmity stopped them from serving and their 'gentility' stopped them from absorbing.

How they all survived out in the inhuman press of a great city I cannot think. But I was able to take a good look at forty-eight of the frailest, and perhaps luckiest, among them, the inmates of the Madras 'Friends-in-Need Society' Home. The afternoon I spent there was a lesson in human pride and dignity. It was also a glimpse of the India of 'John Company's' time, the India between the Black Hole of Calcutta and the Cawnpore Massacre, living on undaunted in the Republic of today.

The Society was founded as far back as 1813 'to relieve deserving poor and to suppress mendicity amongst

the Europeans and Anglo-Indians' of Madras. Among the sources of income of which it still disposed was the Trust Estate of Samuel Mackerteech Moorat who, on the 23rd of May 1815, left 'fifteen thousand pagodas to the poor orphans and needy of this Madras, that they enjoy the income thereof'.

This was the first of a long line of bequests through which the British who had served in Madras for five generations tried to care for the destitute who shared some of their blood. The last, fittingly enough, was 4500 rupees presented to the Society on the 19th December 1947 by the Madras Guards and other units, 'being the balance of the Regimental Fund on disbandment'. Ever since Independence, a gallant trickle of gifts and donations has carried on the tradition as well as could be expected. The latest list I saw had no lack of variety, even if the total proceeds were slim. The items gratefully acknowledged ranged from 'Milk Powder, from His Grace the Archbishop of Madras-Mylapore' to 'Books, from the U.S. Information Services' and 'Flag Day Collection, by the Loco Foreman at Gooty'.

The home that is kept going by these efforts can actually take fifty inmates. ('There will be an election for the extra two tomorrow,' the manager, himself an Anglo-Indian, told me. 'There is always a long waiting-list.') It is technically a home for the elderly, 60 being the normal minimum age of admission. But exceptions are made if the grounds are sufficiently terrifying. ('We broke the rule a few weeks back by accepting an Anglo-Indian lady of only 48. But she was found dying on the streets with a stomach tumour which the Indian hospitals

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had pronounced inoperable and could not spare a bed just to treat. So we brought her in here to end her days. It didn't take long.'

I entered from a busy Madras street into the quiet courtyard. In the middle was a square of brown grass, marked off into four little brown triangular lawns by rows of whitewashed stones which marched stiffly out to corners as though they were on a drill-ground. The triangles had benches, and on one of these a near-white Anglo-Indian sat next to a near-black comrade, talking with the easy whisper of people who only have to talk on until they die.

Lining the quadrangle on the right-hand side were the living-quarters, a row of stone cubicles open to the air at both sides. What this arrangement took away in privacy it made up for in primitive comfort. The cubicles could not boast even a fan, and though the Madras 'hot-weather season' was still a few weeks away, it was already 100° in the shade with over 90 per cent humidity.

I was puzzled by this lay-out until my guide remarked: 'I think this was once an old Army veterinary hospital which the Society took over way back in the 1840s.' In that case, the cubicles had obviously once been the stone stables for horses, and the shallow cement trench running alongside (on which several old things had tripped and broken their legs) had originally been a drinking-trough.

Indeed, despite all the efforts which the Society could afford, these living-quarters still seemed more appropriate for '40 Chevaux' than for '8 Hommes'. The only decoration on the walls was an irregular pattern of red blobs formed by the blood of squashed mosquitoes.

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(‘Troublesome, of course; but after a while the inmates seem to get used to the bites and don’t bother.’) The only furniture on the stone floors was a bed, a chair and a bucket. In most cases the only sign of occupancy was a faded, unframed photograph. Here one sensed the true isolation of these people. There were none of the barest comforts inseparable from an English ‘bed-sitter’. Yet there were also none of the tinselled altars or coloured calendars with which the poorest Hindu will liven up his hovel. It was more than just the means which were lacking. It was also the will. These were personalities, as well as bodies, in a limbo.

What made it all much stranger were those name-plates fastened outside each cubicle: Richardson, Murphy, O’Donovan, Smythe, Wellers, Sampson, Etherington. It might have been Gray’s Inn Chambers or Albany, Piccadilly. As I was conducted down the line, the owners of these names popped out one by one to see me: first, a little brown figure who stood to attention and saluted; then one with a coal-black smiling face, fuzzy grey hair and a straw hat, who might have stepped straight off a Mississippi paddle-boat.

Finally, I arrived at Miss Hunter. She was 86. She was chocolate brown with pure white hair. And she had a startling and absolutely pure Scots accent. She was the show-piece for visitors, and she knew it. Delighted to tell her tale again, she had the supporting documents all ready. As we talked, her less colourful neighbours listened respectfully, as the chorus moves quietly to the edge of the spotlight when the prima donna launches out on her aria.

Her father had been a British soldier, one William

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Hunter of Paisley, who sailed to serve in India well over a century ago. He had died in 1872, when she was four months old. What was left of him she held in her hands.

An ancient Service Book of the 1st Madras Regiment gave the official story of W. Hunter from the day he signed on in Manchester in the year 1844. His safe landing in India by sailing-ship six months later was noted and all the subsequent stages of his training recorded. There were entries, initialled by his officers, about his seeing action in a Burma skirmish in 1852 and during the suppression of the Indian Mutiny five years later. For over half a century she had kept the two medals of those actions. Recently, they had been stolen from her. It was a wonder to me that she survived: the loss must have been as bad for her as for a normal woman to have two children kidnapped.

The book showed as 'distinguishing marks' simply 'a scar on the right cheek'. (A brawl in his native Paisley or a dagger wound in an Indian compound?) Of distinctions, there was even less mention. The last entry, in a thin crabbed hand, recorded his discharge and pay-off in India in April 1860. After nearly twenty years of service, our William Hunter was still only a Corporal. She pointed this out with no sense of regret, explaining that her father had never been a pushing man.

'A sensible rank, Miss Hunter,' I assured her. 'Not too much responsibility and not too little. Just like that of captain among the officers. I never enjoyed any rank below or above.'

She capped me delightedly, in her faultless Scots brogue:

'That's just it, sorr. Me deddy told me mother —

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"There's too many of me old Paisley boys in the Regiment now and a rowdy lot they are. If I get to be sergeant, I'll be clapping them all in jail." — So a corporal me deddy stayed, sorr !'

Could she, I wondered, claim a British passport on that faded Corporal's Service Book of a vanished Imperial regiment, with all the hands that penned the entries long since stilled? I gently asked whether she had any plans.

'Of course I'd love to go back to Scotland,' was the reply. 'But I've nobody at home to go to, that's the trouble of it.'

Home — Scotland: the land she had never seen; the land William Hunter had left close on 120 years before, never to return; the land she could probably never claim in law as hers. Yet she called it home. She seemed the only inmate of that Institute who did not live in a limbo. She was firmly in her Scottish world, even if it was a dream-world. It was a long time before I could forget Miss Hunter, sitting in her stone Anglo-Indian cubicle in Madras, and screening herself from 400 million 'natives' with a century-old Indian Army Service Book.

* * *

Fortunately for them, not many Anglo-Indians are so indomitably 'Old Country' as Miss Hunter. But for nearly all, the emotional image of Britain is there in the background, always ready to swell up. I felt this very poignantly at the Queen's birthday celebrations in New Delhi. Of the 600 guests who crowded the High Commissioner's floodlit lawn, perhaps 100 were of mixed blood — a few holding British passports and the remainder

Indian subjects working in or closely connected with the Commission's offices.

National Day receptions of any sort have always struck me as occasions when the envoy concerned really earns his pay, whatever he does or does not do on the other 364 days of the year. This was no exception — the ceaseless hand-shaking on coming and going, the effort to remember hundreds of names and the even greater effort of shaking off some of their more clinging owners on one's tour of the guests.

For the white British business community which paraded *en masse* in dinner-jackets, this was a sort of annual horse-fair, in which work and pleasure were mixed. The younger ones discussed company news and promotion prospects. The senior ones, with no more advancement to look forward to, continued their assiduous lobbying for that magic mention in the New Year's Honours List which would make all the difference to their retired life at Dorking.

The only people who — arriving with the waiters and leaving with the waiters — seemed conscious of Her Majesty's official birthday the whole time were the Anglo-Indians. A large cluster of them never moved from the band, so as to savour that great moment when the company gossip was cut by a roll of drums, and the High Commissioner, struggling to make himself heard and seen, clambered onto a cane chair to propose the Loyal Toast. Then, those faces as black as the dress ties below them fairly shone against the floodlit trees. One felt that, for this brief interlude, the flies, the dust and the uncertainties of life in Nehru's Delhi had blown away and they were

all standing again on that Imperial Rock of Ages which had split asunder in 1947.

Yet, on this particular occasion, the thing that touched me even more than the guests of mixed blood who turned up were the others, of pure British blood, who could no longer be asked.

A day or two before the party I was taken to dine at the house of an Indian Government official with some aggressively British name like Carruthers. At first, remembering the name-plates at Madras, I had put him down as Anglo-Indian. But there was a total lack of 'Bombay Welsh' sing-song in his accent, and a stolid North Countryman's heartiness in his manner which soon told me he was the genuine article. When I tried to arrange to meet him later that week on the High Commissioner's lawn, he surprised me by shaking his head. 'I'm not asked any longer, I'm afraid. But please raise a glass for me.'

He was in fact an English officer, left high and dry in Delhi after the war, who had entered the service of the Republic of India in a minor post. He had recently renounced British citizenship and become an Indian subject in order to qualify for higher pay. His sole blood tie with England was a spinster sister in Chiswick. It was she, I gathered, who had delivered the final *coup de grâce* to his Lion and Unicorn.

After twenty-five years in India he had flown home to see her and to discuss returning to England altogether. Eighteen hours in the steel monster and he was back in her house, with the smell of cabbage instead of the smell of curry in his nostrils.

Unpacking his suitcase, she had suddenly shouted down the stairs:

'Jim, come quickly, your things are burning.'

He ran up to the bedroom and felt his clothes for smouldering cigarettes. But as he slipped his hand between the shirts, it was the hot sun of India, which he had left yesterday, that greeted him. He looked out at the January landscape of suburbia: a rain-swept vista of semi-detacheds with a plane tree drooping like a tired sentry outside each 'architect-designed villa' (as though houses were ever designed by lion-tamers). And from that instant, he told me, he knew he could only live in his Delhi bungalow where, night after night, he could sleep in his garden with only the stars for a blanket.

Back he duly came, and I doubt whether England will ever see him again. Yet once a year, draped in the Union Jack that is no longer his, the Royal Borough of Chiswick catches up on him with a distant chink of glasses.

* * *

So far we have tasted blood between two flags and blood which changes its flags. But the human driftwood of the Raj floating about India today also includes thousands of English men and women who were born as such and who would never dream of becoming anything else. These are the destitute and desperate British exiles in India. They are the real flotsam and jetsam which the receding tide of Imperialism has left high and dry on the beach.

Their numbers are impossible to estimate with any

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accuracy. They refuse to be embraced by Mother India. Yet she hides them effectively enough under her vast robes; and usually it is only by accident that they are discovered, nursing their pride and their plight in some quiet corner of the sub-continent.

For example, there was the case of the three British sisters living in a half-deserted hill-station. All were unmarried, and one was elderly, one was old, and one was very aged. They were the daughters and sole issue of a British General who had served in India and died there, and their ages, to be precise, were 69, 79 and 89. (The General had evidently carried his parade-ground precision of spacing and timing into his nuptial affairs.) What he had not brought into them was any great fortune. When he died, his pension died with him, and almost the only thing which Papa left his three daughters was the house on the foothills of the Himalayas where they had all lived. They turned it into a boarding-house and tried to earn enough during the hot weather season to keep themselves going during the rest of the year.

But the times were against them. Better air-links with Europe and better air-conditioning in Indian city homes dealt heavy blows at the old-time leisurely summer sojourns in hill-stations. Things went from bad to worse and from worse to frightful. Finally, these three gentle souls had sold everything which would command a price to buy food with, including all their bedding. A stray visitor discovered them shortly before Christmas, alone in their cold empty house, sleeping wrapped up in carpets taken off the floor. They appeared to be facing certain starvation. A telegram was sent to the British authorities

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in Delhi and emergency food and supplies were sent out.

In the same accidental way, a British ex-major of the Second World War was discovered sleeping among the human flea-bags on Delhi railway station; and an English-born woman, deserted by the Indian student she had married in Manchester ten years before, was found just sitting hopelessly on the steps of a village Catholic church a hundred miles from Calcutta, with eight of her ragged children around her. Then there was the British woman hotel-owner in Kashmir who had gone so broke and so *baladi*, as the Arabs say, that she had actually begun to beg in the streets from the Indians, probably the first such complete social somersault on record; and the 'Colonel's lady', also in Kashmir, kept going by remittances from a famous Guards regiment in England in which her late husband had served.

India — the Welfare State in the making — has nothing to offer these forlorn figures yet. And if it had, they would probably not accept it, for they are mostly quite prepared to kill themselves with their pride. This is the nightmare of the British in India who have striven to build up a charitable organization for their needy fellows — the Provident Fund of the U.K. Citizens' Association, financed largely by British business firms. The destitute must first be found in the brown wilderness of the sub-continent, and then persuaded to admit their plight.

As the President of the Association said to me: 'The thing that really alarms me is that the problem is steadily increasing, and is increasing all the time in the dark. Hundreds of British expatriates in India are dropping

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below the subsistence level as prices rise and their savings dwindle. But so many of them don't know we even exist and probably wouldn't thank us for telling them.'

After that, I looked very anxiously whenever I saw an elderly military figure in a patched tweed coat striding briskly along a hill-station road, taking the natives' salutes from either side.

There was little, of course, that a casual visitor could do about it. And I got some consolation from the thought that, apart from the salutes, you could see much the same thing any day on the pavements of South Kensington. The difference being, I suppose, that the Raj has not evacuated South Kensington as yet.

* * *

This has been a little gloomy. But it would be a mistake to suppose that all the British odds and ends floating around India today with no fixed abode or calling are in a desperate way. There are quite a few prosperous cases. For example, the senior ex-ICS official who had retired with his wife in India in 1947 because they 'couldn't face either the climate or the servant problem in England'. Yet even these British, all-white, duly-decorated and fully-pensioned, are now in a dither.

As one of them said to me after dinner in a Simla drawing-room:

'Things are getting so difficult here, you know. The servants are scarcely polite to one any more and there are so few friends left. Last year, we spent a long holiday in Europe looking for somewhere. We tried Madeira and

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the Canary Islands: lovely and quite cheap, but too un-English, if you know what I mean. Somebody told us about Portugal, so we had a look at that; but with all those awful Americans it's getting too expensive. Of course, we've looked all around these parts. We thought of Ceylon at one point. But now that's going Bolshevik it's no good to us, is it? And India itself gets redder every year so we must go somewhere. It looks as if it will have to be Jersey after all. I'm told they allow you three months tax-free in England every year.'

She was a twittering grey-haired woman. Her down-pointed nose and up-pointed chin strove to meet one another, so that from the side she looked alarmingly like the Man in the Moon. The native bearers, originally afraid of her, were passing over to resentment. But she still clapped her hands at them undaunted and had imaginary specks of dirt wiped off the plates. ('It's never safe, you know, now they no longer wear gloves.')

Her husband spent all his time flailing the trout-waters with his own special flies which were as large and as gaudy as miniature peacocks. He had been quite close to the last Viceroys of India and, until recently, had managed to keep up his old Rolls-Royce as a symbol of the vanished glories. As long as he could go on fishing he did not seem to mind the loss of it, and what it represented.

But she thought of nothing else. India for her would always be the Viceroy's Lodge, the hill-stations, and the caparisoned elephants in the Pink City of Jaipur where the princes had given one of the last mammoth festivals of the Imperial age. Her view of the old regime was summed up in the one sentence: 'All those Nizams and Nabobs

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were such charming and polite people, you know.' And what she really meant was that it was nearly fifteen years since anyone had treated her as a lady.

This is the expensive mahogany British driftwood of India. I am not sure it is much less pitiful than the poorer variety.





4

Tea, Tiger Hill and Tuck-shops

THE first two, of course, were no surprise, for one had heard about them often enough before arriving in India. Indeed, Darjeeling's tea when met with on the ground grew with just that natural and inevitable profusion which the name on all the packets suggested. I had driven there early one morning from Kalimpong on the neighbouring ridge, in a taxi whose brakes had as much trouble bringing us down one chain of hairpins to the Teesta Valley as its engine had pulling us up another chain on the opposite

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side. We had barely climbed 3000 feet above the river again before the lowest of the roadside plantations appeared, its fringes sprayed white with wheel-dust. And from there until we chugged into Darjeeling, two hours later and another 4000 feet higher up, the famous tea-bushes spun around us constantly on either side : waist-high, and their tops turned flat by decades of careful picking, they looked like mosaics of fresh green bathroom tiles set in the grey-brown foundation of the hillside.

The view from Tiger Hill — that vantage-point above Darjeeling from which generations of visitors have got their first glimpse of Everest — was also just as the picture post-cards led one to imagine. There was the magic peak, glimpsed for a few icy moments after a spring dawn, before the clouds enveloped it for the day. From this distance and perspective it appeared only as a sharp white shoulder jutting up at the back of the Himalayan panorama of snow and granite. Yet, to me at least, it managed to assert itself over all the mightier foreground that loomed in between. It was at once a lot bigger and a little bigger : one was conscious of all the 29,000 feet and of those ridiculous two feet extra.

This impression, I may say, was not shared by my companions on the excursion — five women and a man from Denver, Colorado, who had stopped off on their world tour between the pagodas of Bangkok and the mosques of Istanbul to take a look at the mountain supreme. As we rode back on mules after the gigantic peep-show, jolted as well as frozen to the bone, and longing for the bacon-and-egg breakfast awaiting us at the hotel, there were several unfavourable comparisons with Niagara Falls

and even with the Empire State Building. The modesty of the world's highest mountain, as seen from Tiger Hill, disappointed them. The general feeling among this sleepy cavalcade plodding down through the clouds was that if you were a giant there was no point under any circumstances in appearing like anything else.

Even this American tourist touch was not inappropriate in the Darjeeling of the post-Raj era. As far as I was concerned, neither Everest nor the tea-bushes which warmed its toes had struck any unexpected note. But it was quite another matter to find that this tiny shelf on the Himalayan foot-hills fairly swarmed with tuck-shops, and all the things scholastically British that went with them.

My first inkling of this state of affairs came when walking round Darjeeling's ancient bazaar a few hours after the Tiger Hill expedition. The atmosphere was not as stirring and the setting not as colourful as in the market of Kalimpong, which seemed to vibrate with the air of the Jelap La Pass above it. But there was a similar, if diluted, mixture of Nepali, Bhutia and Lepcha. There were pork-pie woollen hats in plenty and the occasional carved dagger stuck in a waistband. A faint tinkle of the antique music of Tibet could still, in fact, be heard.

This was shattered like glass by the appearance of five young college boys, each in his quartered cap, blue blazer with crest and long grey flannel trousers. They marched confidently through the throng of peasants selling dried onions and herbs spread out on blankets, silversmiths hawking filigree bracelets and beggars spinning their prayer-wheels. It was like a troop of Kipling's cavalry cutting into a band of dervishes. Even the fact that they

were as dark-skinned as the bazaar population and were led by a raven-haired matron in a gold-fringed sari could not dispel this impact of total yet blended foreignness. They were discreetly chewing toffee; their striped ties had evidently been knotted with extra care that morning and their hair plastered down with extra brushing. And they were discussing, in the middle of this Mongoloid maelstrom, a four-wickets victory over St. Joseph's achieved in yesterday's cricket match. This could only be what it was: a parents' outing on a British half-term holiday.

If there is one thing that is more rewarding than the mystic, it is the paradoxical; for the latter seems just as close to life's riddle and at least gives us two ends of the skein to tug at. In a journey round India, these contrasting appeals constantly replaced each other with a clean click, like slides in a kaleidoscope; and this spruced-up collegiate quintet, appearing in the middle of a Himalayan bazaar scene, produced such an instant change of mood. I forgot about the Potala Palace and abandoned my search for a reasonably-priced Tibetan 'Thanka', or ritualistic prayer picture. With a mind turned to mortar-boards and wicket-keepers, I proceeded instead to follow the schoolboys and their effulgent mama, in an attempt to track them down to their source.

This proved far simpler than I had feared. They left the market square and started climbing upwards towards the residential area of the town via a series of steep paths broken with flights of steps. We emerged onto a quiet street half-way up the Darjeeling bowl which I would otherwise have never found. The boys put away their

toffee and adjusted their caps. Then the whole procession marched purposefully into a clothes shop, whose door-bell sounded harshly as they entered. To follow them inside would have been awkward. But it also proved unnecessary, for the information I wanted was staring me in the face. A gilt-lettered board gave the tailor's name and a row of peeling British titles and crests supplied details of all the Viceroys, Governors and Commanders-in-Chief to whom he had once been appointed. A last surviving ray of this Imperial sundown was the legend at the bottom: 'Official school outfitters to St. Paul's, Darjeeling'. In the window alongside, laid out like decorations on a coffin, were the same caps, badges and ties I had just been following.

* * *

While gaining proper access to St. Paul's, which was my next objective, the mystic again merged with the paradoxical. At the Darjeeling Tennis Club the next morning I found myself playing against the Dalai Lama's exiled brother, whose stratospheric lobs reminded one forcibly that he had been born and raised on the Roof of the World. A friendship soon developed with this admirable young man and his charming Chinese-born wife, and the doors of the town opened all the quicker. A day or two later I found myself riding on an awkward roan horse up the maze of cobbled terraces which led to the topmost crest of buildings. Here, 8000 feet up on a sandy shelf, and with a breathless view across to Kanchenjungha 45 miles away, was the highest High School in the world, St. Paul's, Darjeeling.

Tea, Tiger Hill and Tuck-shops

The St. Paul's School of India (former pupils call themselves 'Old Paulites' to distinguish themselves from the 'Old Paulines' of Baron's Court, London, with whom they have no direct connection) was originally founded in Calcutta in 1823. For nearly one hundred years, however, it had already stood on its present lofty site — Olympian when compared with the Cromwell Road extension of its namesake, yet described modestly in the prospectus as 'forty acres of well-timbered land, right away from bazaars and other dwelling-places'.

Some of the oddities only struck me as such, of course, because I was new to India and ignorant of that strange marriage of customs which would appear natural to anyone who had grown up in the British era. It was unfamiliar but very understandable, for example, to find the school year running from March to November, with two terms Christian and one climatic: Lent, Monsoon and Michaelmas. And it was strange to see that, though lunch and supper appeared as such on the time-table, the meal that came between the Rising Bell at 6.30 A.M. and Physical Training at 7.20 A.M. was entered as 'Chota Hazri'.

But, of the hundred quirks registered during a three-hour visit, at least ninety-five arose, not from the centuries the Lion had ruled in India, but from the fact of his abrupt departure in 1947. Like most institutions of its type, St. Paul's had been founded to give a British public school education to the white boy. This aim was described in its original charter as 'to supply a good education at a moderate cost to the sons of Europeans and East Indians' (*i.e.* officials of the East India Company). In the fifty years before the transfer of power, a handful of carefully

selected Indian boys had been accepted into the school, an infiltration which went *pari passu* with the occasional breaches which the parents of those same boys were making in the ramparts of the white man's clubs. But, until the end of the Second World War, St. Paul's, Darjeeling, remained virtually a European preserve — 'primarily a school for the Domiciled Communities', as the chronicles politely put it.

The pigmentation pendulum began to wobble violently after 1945, and swung over completely after 1947. Today, a white face has become a rarity among the blobs of yellow, brown and black which look out from under the unchanged caps. Indian boys, of course, predominate. They come from all races and all states of the sub-continent and, as in England, seem to have only one thing in common — a parent able and willing to pay the fees, amounting in this case to over 5000 rupees, or some £380 a year. On top of this basic layer of Indian pupils come the scions of the 'Establishment' of the entire Afro-Asian bloc, with Burmese, Siamese and Ceylonese to the fore.

The Cambridge School Certificate Roll of Honour Boards, which line the walls outside the Rector's study, tell this tale with silent but terrible eloquence. The first board, for 1901, contains only one recognizably Indian name. Down this corridor of time and back again these annual Rolls of Honour go and, by an odd coincidence, the last one ends up plumb opposite the first. Its fresh gilt lettering, for the same school and the same examination, contains barely one obviously British name. In this march up and down 30 yards of wallpaper, the Patels and the Singhs have banished the Brookes and the Courtenays,

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while the legions of the Smiths, Browns and Robinsons have been equally put to flight by the Bannerjees, Mookerjees and Chatterjees.

Yet the really astonishing thing is that the ghosts of the faded lettering still reign supreme. This is the paradox within the paradox, the O. Henry 'double twist'. For St. Paul's, Darjeeling, today, in the second decade of Indian independence, is still defiantly, absurdly and triumphantly a British public school.

There is hardly a Christian left among the pupils; yet every morning at 7.35 the school troops *en masse* into the Anglican Chapel, where a normal Morning Service (minus the Creed) is conducted to a congregation of pint-size Hindus, Buddhists, Taoists and Sikhs. What this sea of small brown Asian faces, broken here and there by the blue or yellow turbans of the Sikhs, thinks of it all — the prayers, the Psalms, the Hymns Ancient and Modern, with Holy Communion and full Choral Evensong on Sundays — is hard to say. But the staff's view is quite plain. When I gently questioned the Acting Rector about this somewhat quizzical practice, his only comment was: 'Why not? It's jolly good for discipline!' He was probably right. The Bishop of Barrackpore, in whose territory the school lay, certainly approved; and so did the gentle spirit of Bishop Foss Westcott, a former Chairman of the Governors, now laid to rest in the loveliest grave I have ever seen on the edge of the grounds. Yet this rather pathetic assumption that there was no crack in India too wide to be papered over at the call of discipline reminded one ominously of all those greased cartridges a century before.

Not that, as yet, there was the slightest sign of resentment among the pupils, either towards the Chapel routine or towards any other part of the school framework which had survived intact from the British era. The public school House system, for instance, had been preserved in all its details, even down to the names. This meant that all these little Indian Republicans, nurtured on anti-Imperialism and the Struggle for Independence, spent their years at St. Paul's, Darjeeling, labouring away in classroom and playing-field for the honour of Clive, Hastings, Havelock, Lawrence and certain other props of the Raj after whom their houses had been called. In a decade when, throughout the sub-continent, the equestrian statues of these same gentlemen were being towed away one by one from public squares to museums or melting-pots, this was, to put it mildly, an anachronism. Yet the current school prospectus glides over it with superb deadpan indifference. 'Inter-house competition', we read, 'is keenly fostered both in work and play, whilst co-operation between the Houses is likewise encouraged.' Perhaps St. Paul's is striving for the same illogical workability of the British Constitution, in the dim awareness that such are its best prospects of salvation.

Certainly, despite the paradoxes, no English public school that I have seen could give a better impression of decorous harmony. The same quiet groups of flannelled boys and black-gowned masters gather at break-time in the quadrangle (whose 'monsoon shelters' linking one building to another form the only Himalayan touch). There are the same quick games of lunch-time cricket, with piles of coats for an improvised wicket. At lunch,

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which I was privileged to attend, seated next to the Headmaster's chair at High Table, there was the same warning-bell, the same Latin grace, followed by the same half-second's hush breaking immediately into bedlam.

And the tuck-shop itself was not only the same shape as I remembered at an English school twenty-five years and 10,000 miles away; it also had the same sort of presiding genius, half-way between a friend and a figure of authority; the same heavenly smell of village baker and sweet-shop combined; and even the same assortment of sticky buns and stickier pear-drops, whose odour comes back to one in later life as ladies' nail-varnish remover.

There was some blending as well as slavish imitation. At the time of my visit, the school's History Society had two talks by pupils on its agenda. The first was on 'Ashoka the Great' (the famous 3rd-century Hindu King). The second was on 'George Washington'. The Debating Society had similar plans. The next debate, as announced on the General Notice Board, was on the subject then convulsing the whole of thinking India: 'Should Hindi be made our lingua franca?' But the discussion on the following week was on a topic which public school debating societies, whether white or brown and whether in the Himalayas or the Malverns, have discussed from time immemorial: 'Should caning be abolished?'

The same happy ambivalence prevailed in the School Library. The three pictures on the wall showed Mahatma Gandhi in his loin-cloth squatting between King George VI and Queen Elizabeth II, erect in their Imperial and Royal finery. This particular display, incidentally, was a juxtaposition of loyalties I was to see in only one other place

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in India — at a British-founded and still British-owned factory in Coimbatore, deep in the South.

In an age which has seen the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst unwittingly train half the military dictators of the Arab and the Asian worlds, it is perhaps too much to expect St. Paul's, Darjeeling, to produce nothing but stout little pillars of Commonwealth by these methods. Indeed, more than once, as I watched these grave-eyed, dark-skinned prefects marshalling the queues for the dining-room or doffing their caps to me in the town, I wondered what sort of hearts were beating under the blazer crests. Would they, like so many of our own public school products, go through life in their offices and their homes looking like fast bowlers and behaving like slow ones? Would the memory of a prefectship be for them what it is to so many of their British compatriots — the culmination of authority as well as the introduction to it, a distinction beside which, in life's retrospect, even the command of a battleship or a Ministry seems a little tame?

What *did* go on inside these small brown heads as they applied themselves to their evening preparation under the calm gaze of India's greatest nationalist leader and India's last King-Emperor? Had the 'public school spirit' sunk in deep enough, without the guiding pressure of the Raj, to make them, like their predecessors on those Rolls of Honour, earnest and incorruptible soldiers and Civil Servants of the sub-continent? Or would they, despite chapel and house-system, also develop into that formidable Indian combination of Western principles and Oriental practices, and become just another lot of chattering Congressmen taking bribes?

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One clue to this, I felt, was the extent to which the school syllabus itself could be modified to introduce more Indian subjects, so that the purely native element in these pupils — and not just the imitation European — could continue to be shaped by British methods. The English teaching staff (who, by the way, were getting harder and harder to come by) told me that some steps had been taken in this direction since 1947. Where French and Latin once held supreme sway, instruction in Bengali and Hindi (the official tongues of state and nation) was now compulsory for all Indian boys. India's past was quite properly looming larger and larger in the history periods; India's culture and music were being increasingly studied along with Western. But the British framework was still maintained, and English was still the language of instruction, even for the teaching of Indian tongues. There was a certain apprehension among the school authorities as to how the Government of the Indian Republic would treat this point — ten or even five years hence. As I was later to discover in New Delhi, the anxiety was well founded.

What I was looking for at the moment, however, was a purely English boy who had survived in St. Paul's, Darjeeling, like a sort of last Pale-Faced Mohican, and who could tell me what his Indian fellow pupils really felt and said. But I had still not glimpsed one when the time came for me to mount my roan and ride down the steep terraces into the town again.

My delight can thus be imagined when, as I sat down in my hotel dining-room on my last day in Darjeeling (and the last day also of the school's week-end holiday), the very thing I sought came to occupy the next table.

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The party consisted of two Paulites, in full battle array, with their mother. All of them were unmistakably the real thing — the boys as blue-eyed and fair-skinned as they come, and the woman dressed in an English tweed costume which showed exactly the right combination of good town cut and heavy country wear.

But just as I was working my face into the right sort of introductory smile and easing myself out of my chair, the elder boy froze me into a pillar of salt by exploding in the purest Düsseldorf tones :

'Ach, Mutti, schrecklich dass wir jetzt wieder zu der alten Bude da oben zurück müssen!'

My precious pale-faces were, in fact, the two sons of a West German engineer working on the Rourkela steel project down in the plains near Calcutta. St. Paul's, Darjeeling, had provided paradoxes to the last ; and my mind boggled at getting a Rhineland prediction for its future. But I determined there and then to get an official Indian one.

* * *

I returned to New Delhi via Sikkim and Katmandu, and it was not until some weeks later that I was able to follow up this resolve by finding out what 'the Centre' thought of this problem.

To begin with, I had to bring my accidental exploration of St. Paul's, Darjeeling, into the broader perspective of British education in post-British India.

It appeared there were over twenty 'Indian public schools', divided into four main categories, still flourishing the length and breadth of the sub-continent. The first

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was that group of institutions founded under the Raj exclusively for the sons of Indian princes, Sardars and Jagirdahs. The oldest of these was the Gwalior 'Sardars School', created originally by the Maharajah of Scindia. Later examples were the Rajkumar Colleges of Rajkot and Raipur and the distinguished Mayo College at Ajmer.

A second group was patterned on the Doon School at Dehra Dun. These were privately-endowed and residential, like the Princes' Schools, but were conventionally upper-class rather than purely dynastic as regards the type of pupil. A third category, differing only in origin from the second, was represented by the two Lawrence Schools, strategically perched on hill-stations at the opposite ends of India — one at Lovedale in the Nilgiris and the other at Sanawar in the Simla hills.

Finally there were the institutions like 'my' Himalayan St. Paul's. These were, in point of foundation, the oldest of India's 'public schools', and were distinguished from the rest by having been created as Christian missionary schools. It was their origin, and the corresponding provisions in their charters, which made attendance at Christian church services still compulsory, and thus explained that extraordinary Asiatic congregation in St. Paul's chapel. This fact, I now discovered, actually debarred St. Paul's, Darjeeling, and other institutions of its type from being full members of the 'Indian Public Schools Conference' — a strictly secular body which had recently held its 20th annual meeting in New Delhi. The oddity was that St. Paul's had recently been admitted to the British Public Schools register and was thus honoured more abroad than at home.

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However, despite these technical distinctions, India's 'public schools' were all alike in the common British customs and traditions which still sustained them, and in their semi- or total independence from state support. They were also linked just as strongly by being the mass target of the Indian educational authorities and by thus being forced into sharing the same anxieties about their future.

Dr. Shrimali, the Indian Minister of Education, was good enough to talk to me at length about this, and I can best give the views of Hindu officialdom by quoting one or two of his remarks.

'I would never deny that the public schools of India are valuable in that they provide a first-rate education. Indeed they have many characteristics like character training which we would dearly love to introduce into our secondary schools. But, none the less, they are an anachronism in the India of today.'

'To begin with, a Republic like ours, which is moving more and more towards the socialistic pattern, cannot accept a system where money is the main criterion. The contrast is absurd; a public school boarder these days costs about a hundred times as much per year as the state can afford to spend on educating a Primary School child. The only solution for this is for places like St. Paul's, Darjeeling, to admit even more state scholars than they do at present. My aim eventually is to have *all* the pupils Government of India scholars.'

I asked whether he thought the basically British residential pattern of these schools should also be changed.

'To a large extent, yes,' came the reply. 'Life must be simplified at these institutions. There is no need for those

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armies of servants and no need at all for the children to be waited upon. After all, they are schools, and not luxury hotels. The whole approach of the teaching programme must also be changed.

'Culture and history must be rooted in India, not in the West. The whole system must be transformed to keep pace with the changes in our own national life.'

This led naturally to the key question: Should Hindi replace English as the language of instruction at India's public schools?

'Without a doubt,' Dr. Shrimali snapped. 'All these institutions can only fit in with the India of today by switching to Hindi as their medium of instruction. The English language should continue to hold an important place in the curriculum, but only as a somewhat special foreign language. The common language of the class-rooms and the playgrounds must be Hindi, as in all other Indian schools.'

I gathered from Dr. Shrimali's secretary that the Minister had shortly before shaken the 20th Congress of the Indian Public Schools Conference by making these and similar points in his Inaugural Address to the unsuspecting conclave of largely British headmasters. The puckered eyebrows under some of those Darjeeling mortar-boards now seemed very understandable.

* * *

What is Tom Brown's future in the India over which the Dr. Shrimalis rule? To begin with, it should perhaps be emphasized that the Government neither intends, nor is it empowered under the present constitution, to close

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down the public schools by arbitrary action. ‘We couldn’t even dream in Delhi,’ Dr. Shrimali had assured me, ‘of uttering the sort of nationalization threats which some of your British Socialists have made against the public schools of Britain. If our Indian public schools can carry on when we withdraw our state subsidies — and to judge by their waiting lists at the present rate of fees, they probably can — we will take no direct action to close them down. Our hope is that they will either transform themselves of their own accord into Government schools, or else gradually wither away.’

There are, however, many ways of helping a plant to wither away without actually slashing at its roots; and it is these indirect pressures which British education in India has to fear the most. To some extent, the call for ‘Democratization’ can be met by organizational measures. One hopeful proposal I heard, for example, was that the Republic should actually seek to emulate the existing public school system by creating a network of high-class residential institutions of its own, to which pupils should be admitted on the basis of merit only. A precedent apparently existed in the Netarhat Vidyalaya school started in Bihar by the state authorities in 1955.

But such measures would be mere bandages for the complaint, and not surgery. Even a superficial acquaintance with the problem suggested pretty clearly that its essence was not privilege versus the proletariat but the spirit of the departed conqueror versus the spirit of the former conquered. There is an unresolved antithesis in this struggle which goes far deeper than the pocket-book.

The public school system is foreign to Indians not

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merely because it comes from Britain. (Indeed, paradoxically enough, that is about the only thing which might make it seem less unfamiliar.) It is basically and eternally strange because it is a system designed for rulers.

The object of the team spirit, house rivalry and the prefect's badge is to create a sense of responsibility; and the aim of creating that sense of responsibility in Britain has always been to prepare those imbued with it for positions of authority. Even the experience of obeying is treated as the direct preliminary to the experience of commanding.

The Indian, as opposed to the British Indian, approach to all this is in stark contrast. In its psychological attitudes, India is still the land of Gautama, the Buddha, and of Mahavir, Saint of the Jains. Knowledge is an act of private grace, not an act of public examinations. The basis of learning, like the basis of politics, is faith in the leader's wisdom. 'Gandhiji' was completely in the tradition of these unchallenged peepul-tree saints, and even Nehru, for all his personal impatience with the obscurantism of his followers, is still regarded by the mass of them as a sort of airborne, jet-propelled guru rather than as an elected politician with a revocable mandate. What other nation calls its Prime Minister 'Pandit', the teacher?

To this primitive but still very widespread Indian mentality, education is something revealed rather than automatically acquired, and virtue lies more in submission to an acknowledged authority than in free criticism of it. In this, the Hindu is even more inhibited than the Christian intellectual before the Renaissance, though that is about the simplest Western parallel.

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Inevitably, the aims of schooling are different. 'Ahimsa', or non-violence, and 'Dharma', or duty to the Deity, are two of the basic props of Hindu pedagogics. These are the historic virtues of the suppressed. Tom Brown, on the other hand, is brought up to use his fists and to give as good as he gets. The Deity has traditionally been called on to preside over his curriculum, but always in very practical union with King and Country; and one cannot help thinking that it was mainly for reasons of protocol that God was put first in this trinity. The British educational system used to be that of the conquerors; and it remains today that of the activist and the professional career-man. The public school is still linked inseparably with the allied concepts of authority, prestige and power; to acquire, in the case of the first-generation pupils, and to preserve in the case of all that come after. The real paradox of St. Paul's, Darjeeling, in an independent India is that it is the instrument of a hammer people set down and abandoned in the land of the eternal anvil.

* * *

I sometimes wondered, when travelling around India, whether that fanatical craving for Western education which is now sweeping the sub-continent more furiously than ever before does not reflect some primeval urge of the people to change these Hindu spots and shake off the docile fatalism which the centuries have bequeathed to them. For even the other factors which play a role in this phenomenon—the striving for material betterment and for personal prestige above and beyond the rules of caste—are European rather than orthodox Hindu in their inspiration.

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At all events, as English remains the tongue of India's universities and as the Cambridge Certificate continues to be the standard target of higher school education, it is British curricula which still try to hedge in this stampede and British diplomas which are still its quarries.

And what a stampede it is! I remember strolling down Beadon Street, Calcutta, on the last day of March 1958, and walking straight into a horde of fierce young rowdies storming a 12-foot barred gate and tossing what appeared to be hand-grenades through the smashed windows of a garrison-like public building. At first sight it looked like the beginning of that long-predicted Communist *putsch* against Dr. B. C. Roy's wobbly Congress administration in East Bengal. But the building turned out to be nothing more crucial than the Holy Child Girls' School. The 'hand-grenades' proved, on inspection, to be nothing more mortal than the shells of green coconuts. And the demonstrators were nothing more sinister than a section of Calcutta's 10,000 senior students who had walked out of their Final Schools Examination that morning because they found the History paper 'too hard'.

Stories printed under banner headlines in next day's Calcutta papers filled in the details for me. It appeared that these 'hooligans' of whom Clio was demanding too much had gone into action simultaneously in almost all of the city's examination centres. Students who refused to join the walk-out protest were dragged bodily from the halls. What was described as 'an orgy of rowdyism' then reigned as the rebels proceeded to march round the town and break up all examinations still in progress, without respect for seniority or sex.

The weeping girls I had seen in the courtyard of the Holy Child School were among these innocent victims. Even they, however, did not fare as drastically as their comrades at the near-by Bethune Collegiate School, where some of the girl pupils defended their partly-finished papers as they might have done their virginity. One leading Calcutta paper wrote: 'A girl refused to part with her answer paper, whereupon several demonstrators assaulted her, and she fell before she could be made to loosen her grip. When the headmaster implored the demonstrators with folded hands to allow the willing students to continue, he was slapped.'

I would like to suggest, in parenthesis, that it would be difficult to sit down and compose such a revealing analysis of India's intellectual and moral woes as these few lines unwittingly invoke. First, the disastrous near-perfectness of the reporter's English. Second, the wretched picture of the Indian headmaster — symbol and fountainhead of school authority — imploring his pupils with folded hands for obedience. Third, the fact that he was slapped. Here, I have no doubt whatever that the reporter picked the correct word. People always get slapped in India: they never get hit. The Hindu idea of concentration camp 'Grand Guignol' is when a suspect at a police station is 'slapped rudely' by his interrogators. The whole Parliamentary mechanism of Question Time in the Lok Sabha is put in motion to soothe his cheeks. I may be quite wrong about this, but I personally shall be a lot happier about the future of free India when I hear that, somewhere in the vast sub-continent, one Indian has given another Indian an honest-to-goodness punch on the jaw.

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But, to return to Beadon Street, Calcutta. Beyond the fact that a wall clock was removed, some benches were smashed and 25 students were arrested, I do not know how this tale ended. I imagine that 10,000 students sat for the examination again; and I would not be amazed to learn that Calcutta's educational authorities, in order to avoid another ordeal by slapping and green coconut shells, set some simpler History questions.

In any case, Beadon Street was for me only the beginning. I should have known better than to travel across that gruesome Gangetic plain in the first sweltering days of spring, when the examination fever is far more dangerous than the cholera. At Ahmedabad I found 25,000 students who had taken the Gujarat University's examination seething over the Vice-Chancellor's order to hold a new sitting because a suspicious number of pupils had done well in the Science papers. The 'intelligence branch' of the local police had questioned teachers, university clerks and printing press employees, and a leakage on an organized commercial basis was suspected.

In the Uttar Pradesh there could be no doubt about it. Investigations in this state showed that the same examination paper had been made available to students well before D-Day in places as far-flung as Gorakhpur, Basti, Deoria and Faizabad. This apparently represented a record in leakage. As one commentator wryly put it: 'There appears to be an elaborate organization at work to unearth forthcoming papers for sale to eager examinees'.

But for my taste, the really delirious high jinks were those going on during these same weeks at Lucknow. Here the numbers of examinees had reached locust-swarm

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proportions; and one and all seemed to think that the Five Freedoms included the freedom to crib. At all events, a veritable reign of terror took place in the second half of April, the main victims being invigilators who refused to allow candidates to look over their neighbours' shoulders. Except getting punched, almost anything was happening to them on lonely by-ways.

Alas, I passed through Lucknow too late to witness all this. But that would have been primarily for my own benefit. I could never have done the reader prouder than this graphic account of Lucknow in the grip of student Bad Men. It comes from a despatch to that serious journal *The Statesman*, from a Special Correspondent sent to the city:

'This is examination season here. There being over 300,000 examinees, all sizable halls everywhere in the State have been requisitioned for them, but they still overflow into the corridors.

'Magistrates have ordered silence; loudspeakers are banned. Mr. Raj Narain, a Socialist leader, was recently arrested in Unnao on the charge of breaking the silence-zone rule. This was an effective way of showing, if showing were necessary, that examinations deserve to be taken seriously.

'Indeed, in many towns they have become a law and order problem. Almost every day, letters appear in local papers depicting the woes of invigilators. A few have been waylaid; some have been stabbed, but the number of those who have silently succumbed to threats of violence will perhaps never be known.

'A few conscientious invigilators who met under the auspices of the U.P. Secondary Teachers Association under-

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standably condemned the assaults and humiliations to which they had been subjected in Bareilly, Lucknow and other places.

'They have sought police protection to carry out their dangerous duties. If this is not afforded them, they have resolved "to refrain from invigilation with effect from 1959". So it appears that young students now inspire considerable fear among their teachers. How different it is from our days when teachers were held in awe!'

In fairness to the teachers, who again cut their dismal Beadon Street figure in this account, some vital statistics about Lucknow's primary schools should be added. They were provided by the Indian Council of Social Work which had conducted a survey of the 'behaviour pattern' of the pupils in this Dodge City of the Hindus.

The average teacher-pupil ratio in the town ranged as high as 1 : 44. The average percentage of truants in 170 schools was never lower than 14 per cent over the whole year, and sometimes as high as 30 per cent. Trained teachers in the basic schools began on a salary of 35 rupees a month, and the maximum they could look forward to was 50. Even headmasters started at a mere 45 rupees a month and had an absolute ceiling of 90. It all seemed very meagre for a harried band of men called upon to combine the duties of pedagogue and sheriff.

* * *

Apart from their drollery, these true tales point two morals to the whole problem of education in India. The first is the impossible vastness of the operation, as conducted at present — 10,000 examinees in one solitary

district of Calcutta; 25,000 at Ahmedabad; 300,000 at Lucknow. Though inevitable and relatively harmless at the basic school level, such proportions are avoidable in the High Schools, which is where they also become the most farcical. At the time of my stay in Calcutta, for example, the University there numbered 116,000 students — more than the entire undergraduate population of Great Britain! No fewer than 12,000 'B.A.s' were being churned out by this diploma factory every year, while near-by Bihar, with 51,000 students, was probably adding another 5000 to the annual output of 'graduates' in this one corner of India.

A minute fraction of these mass academic products — those who achieve First Class Honours — are of reasonable calibre. The bulk of the others are barely literate by Western university standards; yet they are literate enough by current Indian standards to have all the pretensions of would-be bureaucrats or professional men, combined with all the dangerous frustrations of job-seekers on a hopelessly overcrowded and under-paid market.

The obvious counter-measure — to reduce the inflated output of these discontented duds and concentrate more upon quality — is more easily recommended than done. Education being the fetish it is in India today, a British-type degree is the young man's indispensable assurance, to himself as well as to his friends, that he is no longer living up a tree. And though its economic value is often ridiculously low, its social significance is still high. On the marriage market, a would-be bridegroom with a B.A. is the equivalent of a would-be bride with a dowry. And, despite half a generation of independence, Britain is still

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the main fountainhead from which this magic flows. One young Bombay bachelor of my acquaintance could not even put the legendary 'Failed Cambridge B.A.' among his claims to sophistication. Instead, he advertised himself in the newspapers to possible fathers-in-law as 'recently returned from England', confident that mere contact with the White Cliffs had set him a notch above ordinary mortals.

This suggests the second point which emerges. The only bulwarks which, at the moment, stand between Indian higher education and sheer bedlam are the surviving British conventions, however weakened and distorted they may sometimes be. The B.A. and the School Certificate may not be everlasting measures of Indian intellect. But any attempt to replace them by synthetic Hindu standards until India herself has become one nation with an established set of values of her own would seem disastrous. A borrowed pattern, particularly when it is familiar, is better than none at all.

The question of Hindi versus English as the top-level medium for all-Indian culture and officialdom is the key to this, as to so many other problems. It is examined separately elsewhere. All that is relevant here is to note that it is the language fanatic who is the really mortal enemy of the universities and public schools of transitional India. As long as these can go on offering the best education to be had in the sub-continent in any language, the little Taoists will go on uncomplainingly attending Anglican chapels and their Republican parents will go on uncomplainingly finding the capitalist fees.

But a premature substitution of Hindi for English as

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the medium of instruction would wreck those standards as well as cutting the continuity on which education depends. And I cannot help feeling that, whatever the future holds for the Hindi language, it would be wise to retain establishments like St. Paul's, Darjeeling, as English centres of learning, akin to French *lycées* in other parts of the world. For, though the present situation is full of paradoxes, it works, and it is still what the Indian 'Establishment' — Hindu or otherwise — wants and is prepared to pay heavily for. British-type public schools in India are bound to become progressively more 'foreign'. But that is no reason why they should become progressively less useful. And it would be better to abolish them as institutions altogether rather than try to impose a truly foreign Hindu framework upon them. How disastrous the latter course would be can be imagined had I been forced to entitle this chapter 'Tea, Tiger Hill and Booths for Vegetarian Mid-morning Refreshment'.





5

A Procession of Tablets

LIKE most travellers, I always try to enter the churches of strange cities — a little to pray, and a lot to look. The effect of any perfunctory praying I did in the churches of India was doubtless slight; but I have never had such solid rewards from just looking. There are places of worship there, still intact and in use, in which the British in India have worshipped for close on three centuries. The architecture, the accoutrements and the records resemble those of any parish church at home. Yet, because of the distance from England and the contrast with local surroundings, the impact of Britain is far more concentrated. And,

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because of the nature of the communities they have served, their atmosphere, shot with the gleam of great names, is somehow more electric.

In the tablets and bronze plates set in the walls of these old churches, in the parchment records of their vestries, and on the gravestones outside, the whole history of the British connection with India unfolds before the visitor's eyes — from the first traders and soldiers of the East India Company to the last Governors and Commanders-in-Chief of the Raj.

The tale is all the more vivid because it was neither composed nor even meant to be told. These are not deliberate writings in the sands of power, but casual footprints which the actors could not help leaving as they passed. They reveal no new facts of significance which have not already been marshalled into the printed histories. Yet, to me at least, these early-morning or late-evening church explorations all over the sub-continent communicated something which I never sensed so clearly in any of the books on British India read till then, or since: the attitude of these people to the life they lived.

The degree of emotional detachment is something staggering, even to someone used, like myself, to viewing his compatriots from abroad. One was acutely conscious, in this age of space travel, of the fact that all these good souls were buried at a distance of months by sailing-ship from the shores of England. Yet I searched the 18th-century tablets and gravestones in vain for a suggestion of 'far from home'. There was nothing wistful, let alone maudlin. If the pestilences which carried them off were terrible, we are never told so. If, through lack of doctors

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and physic, their sufferings were prolonged, the circumstance is never recorded. Soldiers killed in battles which shaped the course of India's destiny simply 'fell in action'. The pioneers seemed unconscious they were pioneering and Empire-builders unconscious that they were making history. I had been told things of this sort often enough by the living. But it was odd to be first convinced of them by the dead.

One of the most rewarding churches in all these respects is India's oldest Protestant house of worship, St. Mary's, Madras. To begin with, the link with the British community which it has served so long is compellingly intimate. It was built less than forty years after the first British settlers moved in to 'Madraspatam upon the coast of Chormandell', the East Indian Company having acquired land and trading rights there from the Rajah of Vijayanagar; and it was dedicated to the sound of ' vollies of small shott fired by the whole garrison drawn out' on the 28th October 1680, in the reign of Charles II. Its construction seemed to owe something to misgivings among the Company's directors in London that occasional visits by their ships' chaplains were not enough to counter-balance the dangerous influence of a Roman Catholic church already built in the Fort for the benefit of the Portuguese residents. Indeed, complaints about 'slackness in public worship' among the Company's servants had begun to spread abroad.

Once the British in Madras had received their handsome church, however, they proceeded to take their obligations to God and the Company very seriously indeed. A visitor to Madras twenty years later writes of the congregation:

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'Though in their own houses they are as thinly clothed as possible, yet when they come to church it is always in the European dress; and when I was there, full wigs happening to be in the fashion, every time a man visited the church he lost some ounces by perspiration'.

My own attendance at evening service in St. Mary's, Madras, was 256 years after that of the young Army ensign who wrote those words. There was no longer, as in his time, an entrance in state of the Governor in his laced coat, marching up to the door between lines of soldiers 200 strong. Instead, forty British businessmen and their wives slipped in with whispered greetings. But, now as then, our prayers were 'comforted by a sea breeze'; and, now as then, the congregation, partly attired in their London Sunday suits, perspired for their piety.

Indeed, one felt that St. Mary's meant more today to the British in Madras than in the proud age of its foundation. The ties which were then taken for granted now have to be fought for. The church had been without its Vicar since 1947. It caught the heart to hear the visiting clergyman, after praying for World Peace, Britain, the Royal Family and the Church of South India, going on: 'And we especially pray that, in Your infinite bounty, You will send us again a minister of our own confession, who will stay among us, and guide us in Your ways'. This was a strange thing indeed to be hearing before the very altar at which Clive of India had been married.

Clive's wedding is only one of St. Mary's many links with great names or great events. Yet, for the most part, the evidence which remains is about as discursive as a telephone directory. Of the famous Governors buried or

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commemorated there, for example, we learn little more than that Vere Henry Lord Hobart died of typhoid three years after his appointment; that Sir Henry George Ward succumbed to cholera within a few weeks of taking office; and that Sir Thomas Munro, Bart., who served throughout the critical wars with Hyder Ali and Tippu Sultan, had seven years of rule before going down with the plague at Patticondah, near Gooty.

The same calm acceptance of a life which was short and usually crowned with an unpleasant end is written on the old gravestones, with their quaint variety of Armenian, Latin, English, Portuguese and Tamil inscriptions. A pathetic number record the deaths of mothers in childbed, infants at birth, young children and youths. I could find only one out of the ninety Madras pioneers buried here who had managed to top the three score and ten. Even of those who contrived to live through the hazards of the place as far as manhood, few endured long enough to enjoy the fruits of their labour. A typical case was that of the diamond merchant John Maubert, who exchanged his diamonds for the stars in 1721 at the more than average age of 37. Of him it is succinctly recorded: 'He liv'd in Madrass about eleven years with a perfect reputation and design'd to England had he liv'd till January 1722'. Which reminded me of that other revealing epitaph I was told about but never saw:

Simpson Sahib lies buried here.
He was to have retired next year.

Sometimes the strangest tale lies beneath the plainest words. The Register Book No. 1, for example, contains

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an entry for August 1689 recording the baptism of Mary, Elizabeth and Katherine Charnock. These were the daughters of that famous servant of the Company, Job Charnock; and their mother was none other than a beautiful Hindu widow whom he had rescued from the flames of a 'Suttee' funeral pyre and made his mistress. If ever there was a film scenario which came before its time, this surely was it.

Equally odd, though less romantic, is the story of the Reverend Christian William Gericke, whose death on 2nd October 1803 is recorded in a monument on the North Wall. The really historic thing about the reverend gentleman — which is not displayed — is the manner of his death. It was brought about by fright caused by the sudden jabbering of monkeys at Rayacottah Fort in the Salem District. I doubt whether any clergyman before or since has been shot before his Maker in quite this way.

The general rule that India's churches will always draw a marble veil over the drama and romance of the past obviously has its proving exceptions. But it was not until I had reached the other end of the sub-continent from Madras that I found a really striking one.

One April evening, when the streets of Calcutta were still so hot that one's shoes sank with each step a quarter of an inch into the asphalt, I made my way to St. Paul's Cathedral. This is the Metropolitan church of India in the premier city of India, for Calcutta grew in the 18th century from a cluster of mud-hut villages to the flourishing base of British power, and was, until 1911, the capital of the Raj. There was plenty of evidence of this proud record of authority in the Cathedral, and all of it seemed

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to be recorded in that matter-of-fact vein to which I had grown accustomed.

A stained-glass window by Burne-Jones glowed discreetly to the memory of Lord Mayo, the Viceroy assassinated in the Andaman Islands in 1872 (the hazards of office being no respecters of persons). Near by were memorials to two more distinguished victims of the fanatic's dagger — Chief Justice Paxton Norman, murdered in 1871; and Sir William MacNaghten, Bart., Her Majesty's Envoy to Kabul, in which city he met a violent end during the uprising of 1841. I also noted a mural tablet to Sir Henry Lawrence, defender of Lucknow, who fell during its siege in the Great Mutiny of 1857, and a brass plate to the memory of five British officers and officials who had simply been 'murdered at Manipur 24.3.1891'.

Dotted among these auspicious memorials were tributes to the anonymous or humble dead — the crew of the *Coleroon*, which perished with all hands in a cyclone in Bengal Bay on the night of 5th/6th November 1891; a captain of the Punjab Infantry who fell at his post while fighting in command of the Crag Piquet on the Umbeylan Pass in 1863; and a British solicitor of Calcutta who had merely been 'drowned by the upsetting of a boat in the Hoogly River, 6.9.1862'.

Then, suddenly, I found myself under a huge tablet erected to the memory of two young British officials of a century ago, Patrick Agnew and William Anderson. Immediately, the tone changed. These two, we read, had been sent in 1848 'to relieve the Dewan of Moultan of the fortress and authority he held'. The Dewan evidently had

other ideas and, on the 19th April of that year, they were 'barbarously murdered under the walls of Moultan, having been treacherously deserted by their Sikh escort'.

The one word 'barbarously' struck an unusual note of emotion; but much more was to come. 'Hand in hand', the gilt inscription continues, 'they calmly awaited their assailants, foretelling the day when thousands of Englishmen should come to avenge their death.' Finally — an unheard-of thing for these tablets — the story is actually rounded off: 'History records the prediction was fulfilled. The annexation of the Punjab to the British Empire was the result of the war of which their assassination was the commencement.'

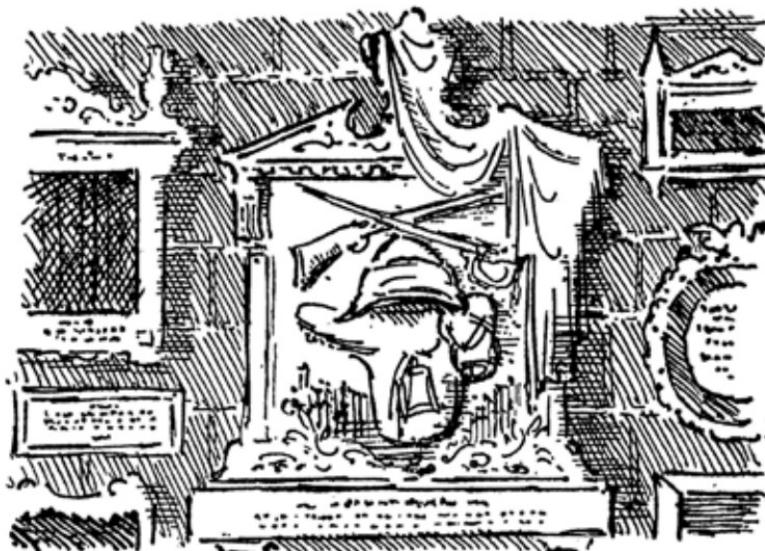
It was not surprising, after all this, to read at the bottom that their epitaph had been specially written by none other than Macaulay. It was undeniable that his contemporary marginal notes were a great help to the visitor of the next century. And it was entirely fitting that one of England's greatest historians should have placed the deed in its historical perspective.

Yet the extraordinary thing was that this isolated burst of eloquence was somehow painful to read. Amid this frigid procession of laconic and allusive obituaries, the emotional Macaulay appeared like a parson dressed in a Palm Beach shirt. His words were what Victorian England thought of her Indian heroes on the far-away North-West Frontier. But, as the scores of locally composed tablets all around testified, they did not convey what those intrepid Englishmen liked to think of themselves. I sensed that Sir William MacNaghten, Bart., was glancing at me in cold disapproval, and moved hastily on.

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There was, indeed, little doubt in my mind that Sir William was right. It was memorials like his own which showed how he and his fellows had lived their lives and faced their deaths. And these inscriptions, here and all over India, seemed to breathe two messages across the centuries. The first was the casualness with which the British regarded both the risks and the issues surrounding them. The second was that odd brand of loyalty with which they served both the Company and the Empire — a loyalty somehow quite devoid of sentiment.

Such dedicated off-handedness was probably one of the reasons why the British rule worked so well and ended so abruptly. There was so much purpose, yet so little plan; so much devotion, yet so little love.





6

Club-land, White and Brown

A SOCIOLOGIST with a sense of humour — if such a thing exists — should really write a history of the role of British clubs in British possessions before it is too late, and the last of both has disappeared. The study might fall conveniently into two parts, which would adjust two popular illusions simply by reversing them. The first part would reveal the insidious death-watch-beetle havoc which these clubs wreaked in the old structure of Empire, when everyone mistook them for pillars of state. The second would examine the useful function they are capable of fulfilling

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in some of those ex-Imperial areas today, at a time when they are universally condemned as being just offensive anachronisms.

India would provide some highlights for both parts of this study. The day when Jawaharlal Nehru, fresh from Harrow and Cambridge, had the doors of the Allahabad Club slammed in his face because, despite the straw hat and the blazers, he was not considered fit for this white man's sanctum, would, for example, illustrate the calamitous influence which Club-land so often had on Britain's Imperial fortunes. Even in the realm of the King-Emperor, few social blackballs can have developed into such political snowballs. On the other hand, the astonishing survival of these men's clubs in the India of today, and their increasing adoption, down to the last sub-committee ruling, by the very people they once outraged, shows their constructive possibilities: through this process, a society in flux can stabilize itself with borrowed standards until it finds new standards of its own.

What should particularly fascinate our sociologist is that free India enables him to study all shades of this privilege spectrum at once. There is everything from Little Rock to Ghana: clubs where the 'natives' are still only admitted as waiters almost next door to clubs where the white man's application for membership must go for approval or rejection before an all-Indian committee. And the astonishing thing is that, in both cases, resentment is rarely met with. The educated Indian seems to tolerate the apartheid institutions of Madras and Calcutta as a last harmless eccentricity of his former rulers. The British official or businessman whose membership of a Delhi club

has to be 'vetted' by an Indian secretary returns the compliment by accepting this arrangement as quite natural under the new order. It is, needless to say, this latter category which is the useful one: the Indian-run mixed-membership club serves as a sort of river lock through which the separate social streams of the Raj gradually find their common level in the Republic.

Most of the choicest specimens of old-style club apart-hood are to be found in the South. There is Trichinopoly, for example, whose 'White Men only' rule had brought it down to exactly three resident members at the time of my visit. Between them, however, they happily divided up the offices of President, Secretary and Treasurer; and, the canons of club life thus being observed, they still turned their three white faces obdurately against 'desegregation'. On those 'club nights' when one of the Three Musketeers was on leave and another on tour, there was nothing for it for the third but to dine alone in the deserted bungalow and play a 'post-prandium' game of billiards against himself. Yet, even at these dismal moments, there seemed to be no thought of lowering the racial barrier. 'Let the Indians in? Good heavens, my dear chap, what are you thinking of? We'd be swamped in no time!' It might have been the sand-castle talking to the ocean in some unwritten fable of La Fontaine.

One effect of this membership crisis is to put a flattering premium on the pale-faced visitor. The most rapacious sea-anemone on the most isolated coral reef could not outdo, in the hungry searching of its tendrils, the eagerness with which the clubs of Southern India embrace any fair-skinned temporary member who swims within their reach.

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And the resulting catch beats anything a sea-anemone could hope for in the way of variety. At Trivandrum in Kerala, I found on the books of the English Club a sanitary official of the World Health Organization, teaching the Indians the mysteries of pull and twist; a wandering minstrel from the BBC, recording strange Hindu noises for the Third Programme; an American Information Services officer spreading the glossy gospel among the toddy-tappers; and a prosperous amateur philosopher who came each year from Suffolk to sit at the feet of a local 'guru'. With the aid of one or two dodo-like residents, all had solemnly proposed and seconded themselves on printed entry forms displayed on the verandah notice-board. Not objecting to their own membership, they had been duly elected.

It was a practical and beneficial arrangement. The club warmed the seats of its neglected cane chairs and the 'temporaries' were profoundly grateful for a bottle of beer in one of India's severest prohibition cities. There was no doubt that, through this rather desperate marriage of mutual needs, the doors would be kept open as long as the rent could be paid.

At one or two places in Southern India, the white community had already succumbed to the social pressure and financial strain of clinging to their splendid isolation. Yet, even where the drawbridge had been lowered, a delaying action was fought for the donjon. An interesting case I encountered in this transitional category was the Bangalore Club, which had gone over to mixed membership while maintaining an all-British committee. This feat was made possible by the presence of a relatively large

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colony of retired white pensioners in the city: former Brigadiers of the Indian Army, Collectors of the ICS, District Managers of large European firms and the like. It was not surprising that they still set the tone, for they were indomitable figures. Though mostly in their seventies and eighties, far from their home-lands and severed from the main tree of life, the dry climate had preserved them as fresh and crisp as fallen pine-cones. They still rode out before breakfast into the cool mornings, and they straddled their bar-stools twelve hours later with a half-mounted look, as if their handy hunters were tethered to the hat-stand in the hall outside. Pall Mall in Mysore will probably die with these hardy veterans. But my guess is that they will continue to exhale its atmosphere and enforce its discipline in Bangalore for the best part of another decade.

To find a retreating action of similar tenacity anywhere in the North, one must go to Calcutta, where, despite industrialization, the white man's club is still the unchallenged centre of European life. Admittedly, the grip it now exerts has no vital pulse behind it; but, like the embrace of the dying, it has astonishing strength.

Various reasons may be adduced for this. There are first of all the city's traditions as the one-time seat of British power in India, which give all surviving associations of that power an additional depth and emphasis. There is the simple (but rather surprising) fact that the United Kingdom citizen population of Calcutta is today higher at 11,000 than it was in 1947. Most are admittedly technicians on short contract and other transients who stand on the opposite frontiers of Club-land to our Bangalore

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brigadiers. But they provide a general background of whiteness against which colour can continue the struggle for its privilege.

And then, most important as far as I was concerned, there is the general ghastliness of Calcutta itself. The world traveller Mackintosh, writing of the city in 1780, half a century after the East India Corporation had first established itself there, was provoked to say: 'From the western extremity of California to the eastern coast of Japan, there is not a spot where judgement, taste, decency and convenience are as grossly insulted as in that scattered and confused chaos of houses, sheds, streets, lanes, alleys, windings, gulleys, sinks and tanks which, jumbled into one indistinguished mass of filth and corruption, equally offensive to human sense and health, compose the capital of the English Company's Government in India'.

I would not go the whole way with the enraged Mr. Mackintosh. But, even today, of all the major cities of the sub-continent, Calcutta struck me as the one where the armchair is most to be preferred to the streets. I imagine similar reactions contributed to the erection of Calcutta's many clubs during its imperial heyday; they certainly help to keep them going after a fashion today.

This fashion varies considerably. The Swimming Club, which has something even more refreshing than armchairs to offer, was bursting with white customers and, presumably, with white revenue. It had, I was told, over 4000 'active' members and, on every occasion I was invited there, all seemed to be active at once. Indians were not permitted through its chlorinated portals, even as guests. This had the one advantage that the water was preserved

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from Sikhs, who make fine warriors on the North-West Frontier and reasonable taxi-drivers in New Delhi but who do not lend themselves as a race to swimming-pools. Forbidden by their religion to cut their hair, they either don rubber caps as violently coloured as their turbans or else shake their tresses free and float along beside you like dusky Desdemonas.

Yet, though apartheid by choice, the Swimming Club provided one of the best paradoxes of the whole pigmentation comedy. There was something truly farcical in the spectacle of pale straw-blonde High Commission typists grilling themselves a deep native brown on the club's sun-boards while, a few hundred yards down the road, their Indian-born colleagues sat in beauty parlours having *their* dark tans bleached a desirable white with paste and lemon juice.

Calcutta's Saturday Club, which, with the Bengal Club, was one of the most popular haunts of British India, presented a sad picture of desertion after the splash and bustle of the swimmers. It too had several thousand members on its books, about 800 of whom were still resident in the city. Yet, even on the Saturdays which gave it its name, the club was about as populated as the middle of the Arlberg tunnel.

I was taken there by a senior member, a charming but disenchanted veteran of twenty-five years' service in Calcutta, who kept himself going with tranquillizer pills and bi-annual doses of the French Riviera. He considered himself a typical supporter if he visited the place once a month. It reminded one of a blasted oak, kept upright only by the iron bands of habit and hope. And, perhaps because it

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was in the middle of a teeming city and not set on a tranquil forest slope, its bareness was far more desolate than that of the planters' clubs. Here, it seemed, even the ghosts had packed up their chains and gone home.

As we entered, a faint smell of onion soup assailed the nostrils. This was apparently held ready in case some eccentric caller should take it into his head to order lunch. Across the hall lounge trailed, of all things, a quoits net, and a court was marked out in chalk over the space once sacred to leather armchairs and cigars. This desperate innovation, which was a new member's idea of 'putting some life into the place', only drew attention to the 'rigor mortis'. Without encountering a soul, we went into the bar. The solitary inhabitant, though it was drink-time, was an aged bearer wearing a vivid sash and turban of blue and gold. He scuttled forward from his stool — a tropical lizard whose siesta on a nice quiet rock had been disturbed by ramblers. He seemed neither surprised nor disappointed when we waved him back and moved on upstairs. Here on the tables were English papers and periodicals; but crumpled and out of sequence — the last crime in a well-ordered club. I noticed that the bound monthly volumes of the *Daily Mirror* were better thumbed than the serious journals while, instead of *Blackwood's Magazine*, there was *Men Only* with the nudes ripped out. A notice announced a forthcoming Bingo night, with fish and chip suppers at special rates for members and their guests.

These touches (plus the exorbitant price of drink) explained the peculiar dismalness of the place. This was still an all-white institution, but after 1947, Whitehall and Sandhurst had been largely replaced by Balham and

Bradford. The former may have been excessively stuffy but, if only for that reason, they had fitted into these surroundings. The newcomers, mostly strangers to clubs in any land, had stopped half-way in their basically understandable attempt to turn the whole thing into a Hoogly Holiday Camp. The result was stolidity unrelieved and boisterousness bridled — the worst of both worlds.

The Left and the Right of Britain still, it appears, meet less readily than the East and the West of Kipling. Here was such a *rendezvous manqué*: its symbol was that quoits net, hopelessly out of place among the reproachful oak panels, the gilt boards of knighted past presidents, and the ageing bearers who hovered in the shadows just waiting for a chance to be obsequious.

* * *

But either the Saturday Club on that particular Saturday gave an unduly forlorn picture of the city's distractions, or else distance lent enchantment to the view for its members. One or the other it must have been, for the most fanatical clubman I came across in the length and breadth of India was a certain Mr. Biggins of Calcutta. I met him 'marooned' (to use his own word) in Srinagar in the Vale of Kashmir in springtime. And that drastic nautical term, used in that context, suggests what was remarkable about him.

Mr. Biggins was a worthy Manchester technician, typical of the post-Independence school of Britons in India, and he had come to Srinagar to try and sell fruit-canning machines to the Kashmiri Government on behalf of his Calcutta firm. Nothing of the like had ever been

glimpsed before in this politically turbulent Shangri-La. Four Dakotas had been needed to lift the machine's mighty entrails up from Jammu over the Banihal Pass; but it was now finally assembled and ready to demonstrate.

He was genuinely enthusiastic about its performance. From his description, one might imagine that all you had to do was to set it up anywhere near an orchard and point its nose at the trees for the *compôte* to start dripping off the branches. Yet he was finding it difficult to put this across to the provincial Government.

To begin with, the Kashmiri officials were busy with a political canning operation of their own: they had just clapped the separatist leader Sheikh Abdullah into jail again. And then, I had the feeling that Mr. Biggins's local agents chose an unhappy way of bribing a Kashmiri official, even when they found one with a little time to spare. Apparently, they would count out the notes, expecting to be told when to stop, instead of just discreetly forgetting the whole wallet on the chair. The official concerned was understandably affronted and made scathing comparisons with British business methods under the Raj. The result was that, for weeks on end, the fruit stayed on the trees and the demonstration plant rusted in its compound like a brontosaurus put out to graze. And, whenever I saw him, Mr. Biggins seemed to be doing exactly the same; which is the whole point of this tale.

It was May-time, and the fabulous Vale was in its most fabulous form — a vast green bowl enamelled with flowers right up to its frosted rim, where the jagged snow peaks of the Himalayas cut into the vivid blue and marked the beginnings of Tibet. Those who could afford it came

from all corners of the earth to explore its delights. There were excursions to be made to the Alpine meadows of Gulmarg, and boat-rides to be had across the lily-strewn waters of the Dal Lake. There was the fortress of the Afghan rulers to be climbed over; the Mosque of Hazratbal to be inspected; while, within a few minutes' car drive of the town, the Moghul Gardens awaited the visitor, intact in all their sensual geometry of 250 years ago.

But not for Mr. Biggins this panorama of natural and man-made beauty, of which (even before the trout arrived) the Persian poet might have written: 'If there be a paradise on earth, it is this, it is this, it is this'. Mr. Biggins had his own 'It is this': a dingy little bar in the only English-style hotel of Srinagar. Here he would sit on most of the blazing afternoons and all of the golden evenings of his first and probably last visit to Kashmir.

I once asked him why.

'Habit, I suppose,' he confessed. 'You see, for the past ten years down in Calcutta, I've closed my office before lunch and played golf and drunk at the club until bedtime. I think the real reason why I like this hotel is that it rather reminds me of the club.'

An awful thought began to assail me about Mr. Biggins. Was it perhaps possible that he *missed* Calcutta?

Mr. Biggins just couldn't wait to get back.

Calcutta at this period, I may say, was simmering at 120° in the shade. That pride of its town-planners, the huge grass 'Maidan', which can look green on occasions, now stretched taut and sore-rubbed across the city's centre like a yellowing lion-skin. Even the pimps outside the Grand Hotel could not run more than a few steps after

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you on their little sister's behalf. (One just sat on a cane chair near the entrance, intoning to all likely customers: 'English schoolmistress; very special'. But despite the splendid wares he was offering, he spoke with about as much enthusiasm as the hawker next to him who was trying to sell purple braces.) To cap everything, cholera was raging with such ferocity in some parts of the city that the flies were dropping like human beings.

But for Mr. Biggins, these were minor points. He missed the ghastly snugness which the white man had carved out of this Indian oven. He yearned to exchange all the eternal snow-fed breezes of Kashmir for the air-conditioners of his Calcutta home and club. Above all, it seemed, he missed that club.

How they would have loved Mr. Biggins, despite his Midlands accent, down in Trichinopoly! Not that they were ever likely to see him there. For it was clear that, unless he were dragged down south at the canning machine's tail, as it had dragged him up north to Srinagar, he would never leave the capital of West Bengal again. Mr. Biggins was, in fact, in the grand tradition of those semi-legendary servants of the Raj who divided their twenty-five years in India between the white Calcutta clubs and the even whiter Darjeeling hotels and then returned to Britain to inform the serious press about the 'problems of the sub-continent'. At first, I thought he contradicted all that I had surmised about the certain doom of the apartheid club. But, on second thoughts, I was not so certain: surely, the supply of Mr. Bigginses could not be inexhaustible?

* * *

Fortunately, the club can act as a colour blender as well as a colour barrier; and of this happier variety the supreme example in India is, I suppose, the Gymkhana in New Delhi. This famous club was mixed before the war and it is now, if anything, even more mixed. Independence has, however, affected less its membership than its administration: the close British control of old has been replaced by an even closer Indian control today. Again, it is the gilt letter-boards which bear the best silent witness to the change. The Roll of Presidents displayed in the hall begins with Sir Harcourt Butler for 1913-15 and works down an unbroken procession of Englishmen and a fairly constant parade of khighthoods until the Rt. Hon. Sir Patrick Spens who, in 1945-47, saw out the British Raj. Then the Indian dynasty takes over, beginning, as a sort of transitional shock-absorber, with the resplendent figure of Sir Usha Nath Sen, Kt., CBE.

Yet the life of the club itself in no way reflects this climacteric in gilt. Superficially, at any rate, the Gymkhana has been preserved intact by its new masters as carefully as any Protected Monument. The little rubber ball still slaps despairingly round the Willingdon Squash Courts; twenty or more superb grass tennis courts are still in play whenever the shade temperature drops below the nineties; and tea is still served on the lawn in that magic half-hour between the last game and the swift, early Indian sunset. The overall impression is of complete social harmony between the 80 per cent Indian members and the remaining 20 per cent which is made up by the different contingents of the foreign colony. The British are still the largest and the most respected of these foreign

contingents; but they are no more than that, and make no claim to be.

Indeed, only on one occasion in dozens of visits did I hear anything resembling a sigh of reproach arising from their midst. I was sitting, one hot spring day, next to a senior British member — a survivor from the old Gymkhana Club — on the stone-flagged terrace by the swimming-pool (Willingdon again). He was about to taste his tankard of beer, and had indeed already opened his mouth to clear a path through the froth, when his chair was pushed violently from behind, and the whole contents were spilt on his lap. The culprit was a 12-year-old son of an Indian Army member who was chasing four yelling friends between the tables on their way to the diving-board.

The chatter all round of Hindi and Hindi English made it difficult to catch the apology. At all events, a few seconds later, insult was added to injury when the five rowdy playmates leapt feet first together into the pool, sending up such a splash that more drops appeared beside the beer stain on the senior British member's white trousers. Unhappily, it was already past tea-time and the water, though fresh and clean that morning, already wore a pronounced five o'clock shadow which would surely take some removing.

I had expected the victim to explode, for he was a fiery individual with a shrunken hawk-nosed face, like some head-hunter's trophy of a 'pukka Sahib'. But all he said, as he dabbed away with his handkerchief, was: 'Silly of me to suggest a drink here; but it used to be such a quiet spot in the old days.'

There was wistfulness, but not much else, in his voice.

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It was as though all the anger had been drained away long ago in that social levelling process which the ravaged trousers symbolized. In any case, such indignation was rarely justified, for, as I have said, both the provocation and the nostalgia of this particular incident were quite exceptional.

It is perhaps more difficult to maintain the old atmosphere indoors than outdoors; but no effort is spared. The bar manages to attract its customers, even on Delhi's twice-weekly 'dry days', when Indian Puisne Judges can be seen standing rounds of fruit juice to Iron Curtain diplomats and American Point Four advisers. The bridge fours continue their 'post-mortems' in the card-rooms and the games of snooker click away on the billiard tables. Even the club notices do their best to keep pace. The old board devoted exclusively to 'Stabling and Kennels' was still up, for example, though the most horsy items it could offer now were 'six lovely baby bunnies for sale' and 'home needed for two house-trained Siamese kittens'.

Nor did the new regime hesitate to lend a personal hand in keeping the old customs alive. Christmas and New Year, I was assured, were celebrated with all the plum-pudding ritual and plum-pudding jollity of the Raj. Hindu, Moslem, Sikh, Parsee and European members alike all chimed in to sing 'Good King Wenceslas' in club-rooms decorated with Christmas trees, tinsel and paper streamers. And on New Year's Eve, this same band of predominantly Asian minstrels join hands to render 'Auld Lang Syne' — a sight I would have gone a long way to see.

They tell me that, for a decade or two after the departure of the last of the Moghuls from Old Delhi, the

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Friday processions from the Red Fort to the Jama Masjid were still kept up, almost as though the ingrained habit of a conqueror's ceremonial had gone on moving with a residual momentum of its own. Perhaps this annual chorus of 'Auld Lang Syne' in the Gymkhana Club of New Delhi is a similar trick of social ballistics, performed in the temple of another conqueror who passed over the Ganges plain. My own feeling is that Indian tributes like this to the British way of life, whether they survive in themselves for ten years or a hundred, point to something more lasting. There is absorption here as well as imitation.

One way of measuring the deep impact which English club life, and all the social attitudes this implies, has made on the educated Indian is to compare the Gymkhana Club today with, say, the equally famous and well-appointed Gezira Club in the first years of Nasser's reign. Cairo between the Suez Treaty of 1954 and the Suez débâcle of 1956 had certain social similarities with the New Delhi of Nehru. British power had gone, leaving both capitals in that disorientated condition of cities to whom independence has come as a long-awaited but total stranger. British influence and privilege still, however, remained — symbolized in Cairo in 1954 by the fact that the British Embassy's garden still stretched right down to the shores of the Nile, thus blocking the whole of the river bank road project in order that 'His Excellency could take tea . . .' with a better view of the boats.

In this time of transition, the question often puzzled me: would Nasser's Egypt, ruled by the soldiers whom Britain had trained, preserve anything essential of the British way of life? Sometimes, odd details suggested it

might: like the Camel Corps on Revolution Day, loping past the saluting base to the strains of 'The Men of Harlech'.

It was the Gezira Sporting Club, pride of the Condominium, which convinced me, long before the disastrous autumn of 1956, that this was a vain hope. Like the Delhi Gymkhana, it had been transformed by Independence from a British-run mixed club to a basically indigenous institution and, in both cases, outward appearances had been preserved by the new masters. There the parallel ended, however; for in Cairo, unlike in Delhi, co-existence was limited. Before the arrival of Gamal Abdel Nasser, the British had carved out at least two exclusive sporting domains for themselves and, even after the take-over, the Egyptian members made no attempt at penetration.

The first was the bowling green, protected by its discreet rampart of privet hedge. Here the Yacht Club would congregate when the midsummer Nile flood drove them off the river. During these clammy weeks, the brown waters surge high up the piers of the bridges, and swirling cataracts form across the mile-wide stream so that even the native barges have trouble furling their triangular sails and slipping under the arches. At Roda, the 'Nileometer' shows over 20 cubits; at Minia and Nekheila, the maize fields are swamped and the mud huts are washed away. Dykes are strengthened, tents are issued to the homeless and extra okes of sugar and wheat are given to the needy. Terror stalks the countryside and Egyptian Public Works engineers reluctantly cancel their week-end leave.

But on Gezira Island, the Yacht Club were always to be found unruffled and safe at their August anchorage on the bowling greens: stolid pipe-smoking figures with flannel trousers, Panama hats and rubber-soled shoes — and British, or at any rate European, one and all. What Egyptian member indeed would have dared to disturb this South Coast sea-front scene, where the men signalled the woods in with waves of hankies, and the assembled British wives on the near-by benches clicked away their afternoons with knitting needles?

Perhaps even more ominous was the virtual monopoly which the British exercised in Gezira over the cricket. This was due to no arrogance of their own. Occasionally an upper-class Egyptian convert would be drawn in by curiosity or snobbery. One was then presented with the choice sight of a native 'coach' (clad in the *galabia*) instructing him at the nets in 'kovver-drives'. But, by and large, the game just failed to take on. This estrangement was evident even in the attitude of the native groundsman who would water and prod the grass like the waiter in the pavilion near by mixing the whisky and soda — both going through a foreign ceremony taught them by the white man for his pleasure. And when, at the twilight call from the minarets, the groundsman dropped his sprinkler hose to prostrate himself on the popping-crease in prayer, the feeling of remoteness was complete. That the British would never have penetrated Egypt in a thousand years seemed to me evident from the fact that the willow bat never really left their hands.

The contrast with India, or even Moslem Pakistan, is eloquent. Britain's national game became completely

theirs, and something of the spirit of the cricket-field passed over with it. Indeed, there was no single sport or pastime introduced by the British into the sub-continent which was not fully shared. A white man's bowling green would have been unthinkable at the Delhi Gymkhana. In the realm of sport at least, the Indian was always an equal, and the traffic even a two-way one. It was from the Maharajahs that the British learned their polo.

There is a swimming-pool scene I once witnessed in the Gezira Club which, compared with the incident already described at the Gymkhana pool, points an exact contrast between Cairo and New Delhi. The English members of Gezira were never at such a palpable disadvantage *vis-à-vis* the 'natives' as when they were in the water. The Egyptians, among the finest swimmers in the world, bore along like chubby brown torpedoes, leaving the white forms bobbing in their wake with that characteristically British look of mild astonishment at being able to keep afloat at all. But, on this particular occasion, one of the young torpedoes was making himself altogether too much at home by relieving himself in one corner of the pool, only a few feet away from an elderly Englishman floating stiffly by on his back like a dead star-fish. The English member spluttered so violently, in anger and remonstrance, that he nearly went under. Quite unconcerned, the young offender retorted: 'This is Egyptian water now, and I shall do what I like in it!' And he did, indeed, continue to empty the remainder of his copious bladder into the pool.

Now there are several reasons why this would be an unlikely happening in any mixed club of India. The retort would have been an unnatural one because Indian national-

ism, even in the heat of its final struggle and triumph, rarely ever had a malicious quality. And the incident itself would have been improbable for reasons of habit as well as of hygiene. The Indian, unlike the Egyptian, is what is called a good club-man. He is always in search of set standards of morals and behaviour by which to chart his life; and when he has found them, even by borrowing, he yields to none in the discipline of his conformity.

This suggests an additional factor. The educated New Delhi Indian makes such a good club-man because he accepts the social hierarchy system on which English club life is constructed and for which his own caste system has mentally prepared him. Indeed, the All-Indian Committee of the Gymkhana Club are reputed to be even stricter in their choice of new members than their British predecessors; and their standards of admission or rejection, lacking a Hindu *Debrett* or *Almanach de Gotha*, are largely based on the official standing of the candidate. This makes the application form itself read exactly like a Government document. Though there is a space where the non-bureaucrat can enter his 'other profession, if any', the assumption is that the applicant will be an Armed Forces officer or a Civil Servant, and the most important section of the form is the supporting statement of his regimental or departmental chief.

It is clear from all this that New Delhi has a monumental Indian 'Establishment' of its own, and that the Gymkhana Club is its temple. The value of this very British phenomenon for free India has been contested. I have heard Indian Socialists argue, for example, that the power of this governmental-technocratic class in India

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today is the Republic's biggest handicap in its efforts to become a Welfare State. This type of reformer sees India as the almost ideal field for realizing his dream of the classless state. The Republic inherited no aristocracy in the accepted sense of the word, and (apart from colour and caste prejudices) not much snobbery. In the old India, even the princes and their families were clans rather than classes apart, while below this microscopic community of local rulers there was no wedge of native counts and squires stretching right down and into the topmost sections of the middle class.

It was left, in fact, to the British to raise an intermediate range of officialdom between the village and the palace, of which the Indian KCSIs and other senior members formed the leaders. Now, though the Star of India has set for ever, this new aristocracy it once emblazoned has gone on from strength to strength. With the princes reduced to powerless pensioners and their heirs queuing up for jobs in Western business firms, the Generals, Deputy Secretaries and Chief Justices form the top of the only all-Indian pyramid which exists. The worship of the bureaucrat shows far more clearly than the worship of the cow that India is still an undeveloped nation.

Yet, despite this, I would hesitate to criticize either the Indian 'Establishment' or those clubs, like the Gymkhana, which are its social and spiritual home. Until India can become one nation, it is precisely her non-political officials who must function as her patriots. Like the Austro-Hungarian Empire — another fortuitous union of many races, creeds, tongues and provinces — she will have to be administered rather than ruled. And for all their occasional

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vanity and pedantry, these British-trained Indian bureaucrats, with their inherited ideals of service, are still the best guardians available of the public conscience.

I would shudder to think of the whole sub-continent as one Gymkhana Club. But I would shudder also to think of India in the next critical generation without New Delhi and its earnest bevies of bureaucrats. These senior Indian officials, as grouped together in the present Gymkhana Club, probably constitute the biggest concentration of professional responsibility combined with the smallest dose of political ambition to be found anywhere in the world. This Anglo-Saxon blend should at least save their country from becoming the playground of frustrated professors (like the Balkans before Communism) or of crusading Army officers (like the Middle East today).





7

A Matter of Temperament

HAD the late lamented humorous artist Pont ever gone to India to draw a series of his 'National Characteristics', one of his sketches would certainly have been entitled 'Tendency to oppose Innovations'. And, for this particular illustration, he could not have done better than copy from real life a scene I once witnessed in the backwoods of Mysore state. Two coolies plodded through the shimmering dust of the roadside carrying between them, *on their two turbanned heads*, a brand-new wheelbarrow laden to the brim with bricks. They had presumably been instructed how to propel this strange contraption and the wheel was, needless to say, in perfect order. Indeed, it spun slowly

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round in the air with the smooth rhythm of the men's walk. But they had always been used to sharing loads, and how can a wheelbarrow load be divided, except as they were doing? In any case, old though the wheel is, the head was there before it.

'Yes, difficult to get these beggars to change their habits,' grunted my companion, when I drew his attention to the astonishing sight. He was a veteran English merchant, whose topee had taken the heat of thirty Mysore summers and, for him, such native conservatism was part of the countryside. It was the same, he explained, with the WCs which were being installed in selected village houses. The villagers listened politely to the explanations of the hygiene officers and obediently experimented with the new method themselves. In the long run, however, most of them seemed more impressed by the solid roof and the dry tile floor of the convenience than by its gleaming enamel basin. And the result was, as often as not, that the villagers used this latest gift of civilization to store their wood or grain and continued, like their forebears, to use a plain hole in the earth for other purposes.

There is more to this resistance than just plain peasant stubbornness and suspicion. The whole social pendulum of the nation still swings unsteadily between the vision of Gandhi and the vision of Nehru, between an India based on the home crafts of her 550,000 villages and the India of the Bhakara Power Dam and the Rourkela Steel Plant. Nehru the pupil holds the stage with his Five-Year Plans for industrial transformation. But the shade of Gandhi the master is still in the background, brandishing his spinning-wheel in protest against all this new-fangled

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mechanized town life. The phenomenal success since 1951 of Vinoba Bhave and his 'Bhoodan' or land-gift movement may well revive such village mysticism and, with it, Gandhi's old call for the 'simple way of life'.

The call itself is partly ascetic, the 'guru's' worship not only of simplicity but also of poverty for its own sake. But it almost certainly carries with it unconscious echoes of something political as well. India's foreign invaders sat in the ports and cities of the sub-continent or in the capitals they created; they rarely penetrated the countryside. As a result, over the centuries, the villages became symbols of the spiritual impregnability of the conquered. Their very backwardness was their best defence, for the essence of the atavistic nationalism they represented was the illusion that a community could rise above change, as the great religions of India strove to. Thus, one way and another, there may have been several complex instincts which prompted those two Mysore coolies to hoist the wheelbarrow onto their heads.

Even in the cities of India, the impact of foreign influence appears to be a generation behind, as is probably inevitable when a people take their inspirations second-hand and from sources which are many thousands of miles distant. The Indian cinema is still the Hollywood of the 'thirties; the architecture tends to get stuck at Lutyens and the reading at Thomas Hardy. This is no new phenomenon: some of the best Regency-style buildings were only erected, for example, in the Victorian age.

Yet even if such influences pant rather breathlessly so as not to lose their place on the treadmill of time, they are undoubtedly there. In the countryside, the era of British

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rule served only to fix the existing Indian mould still more firmly in place. In the towns, this era has at least created the present rulers of the sub-continent, the 'Westernized Indians'; though it is doubtful how far this interesting Asian product differs in basic character, as opposed to just patterns of social behaviour, from the rest of his countrymen.

What struck me personally as the principal qualities of the educated Indian were his tolerance, hospitality and humour on the positive side, balanced by his fatalism, indecision and 'hypocrisy' on the negative scale. (This, of course, is a purely subjective Western liberal division: the Communist would never class tolerance as positive, while the Hindu himself would not accept fatalism as something negative.)

These two trios of characteristics overlap internally and each trio is, to some extent, the complement of the other. No single quality among the six was first planted in India by the foreigner, like the coffee-beans in Coorg. Yet it is perhaps true to say that foreign domination, and especially British rule, helped to accentuate both the good and the bad. The Western ideals of democracy, which the Indians imported to smash Western domination, left their lasting mark, for example, in the social field. Class and caste barriers were loosened as well as Imperial bonds, and the free Indian who emerged in 1947 was a far more tolerant person as regards his fellow citizens than the subjected Indian who had gone before him.

Unfortunately, some of the less useful qualities of his predecessor have lived on as well. Their points were so sharpened by the Raj that it has so far proved impossible to remove them from the nation's flesh, yet, paradoxically,

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it is only after the end of the Raj that these hooks have been really felt. The Indian's irresolution, his fear to commit himself, was a natural and almost comely feature of a political scene where all decisions were anyway taken by someone else. But a government groping for a policy is a less attractive sight than a bearer groping for a tip.

This irresolution is at its worst in the Anglicized official world of sovereign India, where its extent is best conveyed by Mr. Nehru's tearful pleas to his subordinates to 'think and act for themselves'. But, even to the casual visitor, it seems so embedded in the people at large that the slightest gesture or habit can betray it.

There is, for example, the grunt down the telephone. I have heard this strange animal noise coming at me out of the ear-piece all the way from Madras to Mussoorie. It is a throaty sound, somewhere between a 'Hum' and a 'Ha', with which the invisible speaker will conduct his share of the conversation for minutes on end. Though it may contain several shades of emphasis and intonation which the connoisseur alone can catch, this wordless language neither accepts nor rejects the remarks you are making. It is the ultimate in non-commitment; indeed, its main purpose seems to be simply to let you know that your party hasn't dropped dead at the other end of the line.

This vocal indecision is matched visually by that parabolic waggle of the head which is such a frequent feature of face-to-face conversation in India. It is neither an up-and-down nod nor a side-to-side shake, but an elliptical movement combining both. Nor can one glean very much from the actual timing of this combined 'Yes-and-No' motion. It often starts up before you have made your

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point and continues long afterwards, in lieu of a reply.

One seems to rediscover this exact pattern in Indian music. Whenever I heard the two-stringed 'Dvitara' lute starting to twang, these conversational parabolas of grunt and waggle reappeared before me as if drawn in the air. There is the same perpetual parry, made even before the lunge is completed. The quarter-tone compositions are forever slithering round a melody, always on the run from a major chord, always ducking a harmonic issue.

I even got to the stage where I suspected the traditional 'Namaskar' greeting — the hands pressed together palm-to-palm in front of the breast—as a symptom of this universal irresolution. How much less initiative, I thought, was shown here than by our Western handshake which did at least stretch something out and served, in the old days, the highly practical purpose of demonstrating that your fingers were not around your sword-hilt.

Indian friends patiently explained the errors in my reasoning. Their form of greeting, they pointed out, was as practical in origin as mine. In a hot country, it was not hygienic to clasp hands. Among societies permeated with caste 'tabus', it was furthermore advisable to avoid casual physical contact which could prove embarrassing and even disastrous. In any case, the ultimate derivation of their greeting was that of prayer, and was this not far better than any gesture derived from the swordsman? I remained at once convinced and unconvinced by these gentle reproofs. Especially the last point seemed again to indicate that gulf between action and passivity which divides the Anglo-Saxon from the Hindu world. It is a bigger and clearer gulf than that between good and bad.

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In explaining their second negative quality of 'hypocrisy', my Indian mentors had more success, as the inverted commas indicate. At first sight, the two-facedness of Indian living and thinking is irritating and even repugnant to the Western observer. There is no free country in the world which talks more earnestly and more volubly about socialism. Yet nowhere have I seen servants treated more abominably than in some 'enlightened' Indian households. There is no philosophy which exalts all living creatures to such a place of honour as does the Hindu faith. Yet nowhere have I seen animals handled with such monotonous brutality. (The country's 200 million sacred cows form a sort of soul-washing exception. As has been pointed out, bovicide in India can still be a more serious matter than homicide.) No non-Moslem people inveigh so strongly against alcohol as the orthodox Hindus. Yet nowhere have I seen better-stocked or better-patronized cocktail cabinets than in the homes of some of these Hindu 'conservatives', who spend their official life inveighing against the evils of drink. In no part of the former British Empire has such a campaign been launched to set aside the English language and, by implication, English educational standards. Yet India's leaders, from the Prime Minister downwards, continue to enter their sons and nephews at birth for admission to India's English-type public schools. This is not cynicism, nor is it at heart a calculating policy of 'keeping the options open'. It is just that there is no transmission link between belief and action. The engine races in one direction but, without a clutch, the back wheels can revolve just as firmly in the other.

My Indian friends did not deny these contradictions.

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But it was precisely by dwelling on the two-facedness, or rather on the many-facedness of their beliefs and traditions, that they sought to escape any moral implications. There was no intent to deceive, they argued; it was simply thinking at two levels simultaneously. There was no question of pursuing one course, well knowing that the opposite was right. For, whatever the tenets of their faith tried to lay down, the plain fact was that standards of absolute good and bad were almost impossible to identify on the evidence which their religion gave them. Hindu mythology contained deities which were wicked as well as wise, so that, somewhere in this teeming Pantheon, a model could be found for most patterns of behaviour. Corruption in public life was, for example, a deplorable thing (this was a reference to a major scandal in New Delhi which had recently led to the resignation of the Union Finance Minister). But, as the Hindu gods in heaven were themselves so notoriously venal, accepting and even demanding bribes for their dispensations, why should the Hindu official on earth feel particularly ashamed at opening his palm? We finally arrived at a compromise on this: the Englishman could not be blamed for accusing the Indian of hypocrisy; the Indian could be understood for indignantly refuting the charge.

What there was general agreement over was the fact that the long centuries of foreign rule had only increased this inborn two-facedness of the people, at least in the upper reaches of the nation. For generation upon generation of these educated Indians had served the conqueror with a devotion matched only by the fanaticism with which their other self had opposed him as an 'infidel'

oppressor' (in the case of the Moslem) or as a 'wicked Imperialist' (in the case of the British). And, again, it was the ritual of Hinduism which provided the means of wearing both faces without loss of profile. The high-caste Hindu might toil in the service of Islam all day. But, after a complete change of clothing, a splash of holy Ganges water and a quick bite of expiatory cow-dung, his soul was cleansed afresh each evening so that his body might be received again in the bosom of his family. Of all the hundreds of circles which the Indians have managed to square in their time, this is surely the most remarkable: they perfected over the centuries the art of patriotic treachery.

Perhaps all these discussions would have been forgotten — or at least preserved in the memory purely as social curios — had not a document expounding the famous political doctrine of 'Pansheel' been pressed into my hands towards the end of my time in India. For here, promoted to the far more critical realm of current international affairs, it cropped up again, all of it: the slap instead of the punch; the 'now-you-see-it, now-you-don't' of those Hindu cocktail cabinets; the greeting that shuns the commitment of contact; the 'Yes-No' waggling of the heads; the voiceless grunts down the telephone; and the slithering music of the 'Dvitara' or 'Vamsi', playing airs like snakes of which you always see just the tail disappearing in the long grass.

'Pansheel', it will be remembered, has been adopted as the more or less official basis of India's foreign policy. It is, in origin, an ancient Sanskrit word meaning 'five rules of conduct'. The five rules are the Buddhists' equivalent

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of the Christian Ten Commandments — five prohibitions laid down 2500 years ago by Buddha himself for all men to follow who wished to achieve enlightenment and so break out from their recurring cycle of birth and death.

It was Dr. Suekarno, the Indonesian President, who first brought Buddha back into politics — that is to say, brought him back in the special sense that a Hollywood producer 'revives' Shakespeare. For the five basic principles of his state policy which this Asian wonder-boy announced on 1st June 1945, though called 'Pantjasila', had nothing to do with the Enlightened One's tenets of old. They were: belief in God; humanitarianism; nationalism; democracy; and social justice. Suekarno had, in fact, simply pinched the title.

But the end of this copyright robbery was not yet in sight. At a banquet given for Dr. Suekarno on 23rd September 1954 Mr. Nehru appropriated both the old title and the new idea. He described, as India's 'Panscheel', five principles which had recently been laid down to govern her relations with Communist China: mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; non-aggression; non-interference; equality and mutual benefit; and peaceful coexistence.

Six months later, in April 1955, the Bandung Conference inflated this concept with a lot of air from vigorous Afro-Asian lungs. Another major blast into the balloon came from Marshal Bulganin and Mr. Khrushchev in their music-hall tour of India during June of that year. Smaller puffs were produced later from Cairo, Belgrade, Prague, Warsaw and even from freshly neutral Vienna. More than thirty countries, it is now claimed in New Delhi,

support the idea of 'Panscheel' as the basis of international relations. It is a sobering thought that this recommended basis consists, tacitly or explicitly, entirely of things that nations should not do as opposed to things they should do; and that it pays not even lip-service to the ideals of freedom, justice, liberty, human dignity or any other of the goals for which one half of the world still strives.

Perhaps even more sobering than the contents is the actual context in which this Hindu-like code of diplomatic abstentions was launched. The five tenets were originally written into the 1954 Sino-Indian pact on Tibet, by which, in return for his fine phrases, Nehru hoped to buy guarantees for the Dalai Lama and security on his Himalayan frontier. In the spring of 1959, the Chinese Communists exploded these hopes and, by exterminating the Tibetan way of life Nehru had sought to protect, they blew up also 'Panscheel's' five principles as a reliable basis for relations between Peking and Delhi. With unconscious irony, they waited exactly five years to do so.

Public opinion in India seethed; but, apart from an occasional outburst of asperity, the official world swallowed the outrage in silence, glad perhaps to have so many faces so that the red cheeks of 'Panscheel' could be the better hidden. To be honest, however, one cannot help feeling that it was their reaction, and not the indignant protests, which came nearest to the basic temper of India. For despite all that the Chinese have done in Tibet or, for that matter, the Russians in Europe, India's conscience, like her philosophy, is elastic enough to swallow it. Indeed, it would not be astonishing if both Chou en-Lai and Stalin were to get their place in a hundred years' time in the

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cosmic Pantheon of Hinduism. Chou would look nice among the Nagas, or Snake-Gods, while Stalin surely has a seat reserved for him on Mount Kailas at the feet of Kali the Bloodthirsty, who wears a garland of skulls, and holds in one of her left hands the head of a decapitated colleague.

The Indians certainly did not inherit this amazing faculty of absorption from the British, who conquered because they were so different and abdicated because they stayed so different. Yet this native talent may help India, even more than the British heritage of government, in her growing conflict with Peking. On paper, the Chinese have all the relative advantages: numbers, security, self-confidence and vigour. But the Indian anvil may none the less outlast the Chinese hammer. For China must subdue Asia to win; whereas free India only has to survive. The Indians are awfully good at surviving.





8

Mace and Mess-kit

THE death of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad took place only a week or two after my arrival in New Delhi. He was the most respected and influential Moslem in Indian public life: a veteran of the Congress struggle, a close friend and adviser of Jawaharlal Nehru; and a stout champion of that 'secular Republic' of the future in which Moslems, Hindus and all other creeds might one day live together without strife as compatriots of the new India.

Something compelled me to go and watch his funeral. (In doing so, as I later discovered, I was inviting my own, for the coils of a boa-constrictor are as butterfly wings compared with the embrace of a hysterical Indian crowd.) The spectacle was, however, well worth both the bruises

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and the dry-cleaner's bill, for this venerable figure, who linked India's present with her past, was himself put to rest like a piece of history. The country's rulers and administrators turned out *en masse*. Prime Minister Nehru, an ex-cellmate of the deceased in the days of their Independence battles, was among the pall-bearers. The mob was so vast that whole companies of police, tirelessly thwacking the bony backs with their lathis, could impose no discipline. They mopped their brows in despair and paused to take strength, allowing their victims a ten-minute respite in which to crush each other to death before castigation was resumed. Miraculously immune from both the clouts of the policemen and the press of the crowd, the sellers of lemonade, sweetmeats and jasmin plied their nimble and fragrant trade.

It was, in fact, a native occasion. Yet even in bidding farewell to her distinguished son, free India paid tribute to both her captive pasts. The body, draped in a white *khadi*, was buried in the Urdu Park opposite that great temple of the Moghuls, the Jama Masjid. And Maulana Azad, indefatigable enemy of British rule, was carried to his grave through lines of brass and blanccoed Service men 'resting on their arms reversed' in true Westminster Abbey style; while, after the funeral rite of the Janaza Namaz had been performed, Indian Army buglers stepped forth to sound the 'Last Post' over his tomb. Delhi's repugnantly immaculate crows were outvoiced for once, and wheeled up in panic at the blast. But theirs was the only clamour. All the tens of thousands who were within earshot of the bugles stood as silent as a Cenotaph crowd until the notes had faded out.

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This painstaking reverence for the ceremonial of a departed conqueror is by no means confined to funerals. Independence Day itself, the national holiday which commemorates free India's release from British rule, is celebrated as though it were the Raj, rather than the Republic, which was being honoured. Massed bands 'beat the Retreat' with British regimental airs in a great parade at the foot of the old Secretariat buildings (still referred to as such). And, further up, on the topmost ridge of Lutyens' Delhi, the tea-cups on the lawn of the former Viceroy's Lodge suddenly stop tinkling at dusk as the band at the President's official reception strikes up 'Abide with me'. This was Gandhi's favourite hymn, and it still seems to be the most effective mass throat-choker in the India he left behind him. I noticed Indians of all creeds, but overwhelmingly non-Christian, with tears in their eyes as they sang the words; and I have never seen a Soviet Ambassador more horribly out of place, and aware of it. It was no surprise, on walking out through the floodlit entrance, to find the cannon of the Great Mutiny year still guarding the President's gates, and the initials 'G.R.I.' still carved on the red sandstone flanks of the Viceregal elephants.

Nor are such scenes confined to New Delhi. On Easter Sunday in Darjeeling, I was disturbed in my post-curry snooze by a fantastically familiar wail which wound its way like a serpent up the terraced streets of the town and in through my open window. The preposterous image it conveyed gave me no peace and, after a few minutes, I jumped up and made my way down to the square to investigate.

There, sure enough, they were: genuine Scotch bag-

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pipes belonging to the drum and pipers' band of the West Bengal National Frontier Force. The soldiers were turned out in blue trousers, white coats and dark flower-pot hats, and their band was complete in every detail, right down to the last file of three bass drummers, submerged in tiger-skins despite the heat. They all wailed and blew, and beat and marched and reversed to the tune of Highland airs as firmly and prettily as if they were performing under floodlight in the courtyard of Edinburgh Castle.

All this was being enacted, I may say, under the marble nose of Bengal's great poet Bhanu Bhakta Acharna, whose bust was inscribed in Bengali to emphasize India's new nationalist pride. The rest of the setting around the square was a no less peculiar one for this British regimental display. Along one side, Tibetan devil-masks, Benares saris, Chinese slippers, Madras bronzes, Cochin ivories and Kashmir chain-stitch carpets looked out from a row of open bazaar stalls. Opposite them, among a group of rickshawmen, stood an ice-cream vendor who wore the beige woollen cap of Tibet upon his head but sported the London legend 'Stop me and buy one' in English on his blue handcart. Through the crowd, and at times almost through the band itself, the little Indian and Burmeše pupils of Darjeeling's public schools (whom we have met with elsewhere in these pages) trotted by on ponies — resplendent in their blazers and college caps and with Nepali 'ayahs' padding breathlessly after them.

The Himalayas are relatively young as mountains go. But it seemed to me that, in all their five million years' existence, the lofty white peaks above can have looked

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down on few stranger sights. Yet nobody seemed to notice its oddity except myself.

'Bappies?' smiled the good Anglo-Indian manageress of my hotel when I returned. 'Oh yes, indeed. You see, the season has started, so we shall have them twice a week from now on until the monsoon.' She might have been a Margate landlady talking at Whitsun about pierrots on the pier.

An Indian friend whom I asked about all this British military ceremonial a week or two later in the capital was more helpful. 'The real reason for it,' he explained, 'is that the Army in India are literally the only people who can organize anything like this, especially at short notice. That's why even Gandhi's coffin was drawn on a gun-carriage, instead of being given a purely Indian burial. And because England raised and trained our Army, it is British ceremonies like these that we use. We just don't know any others, and that's why they never strike us as foreign.'

* * *

This blend of the practical and familiar underlies the whole heritage of British officialdom in India today. It is there wherever you lift a corner of the political or administrative blanket: the things we know are the things that work; the things that work are the things we know. And the bulk of both are British.

Sometimes, as with the institution of Parliament itself, one cannot escape the uneasy feeling that this projection of the past is a parody, however brilliant and earnest, rather than the real thing. Not that this destroys its value.

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For even if a parody it be, it is fulfilling the task of the authentic model — carrying these 400 millions of Asia forward in peace and justice through the formative years of their independence. And perhaps, when this critical stage is safely past, the imitation will have grown so close to the original that the paste will be indistinguishable from the diamond.

At the moment, the flash of both can be seen at once. Delhi's 'Lok Sabha' or 'House of the People' is itself the best example of this strange Indian blend, where the true and the false in Parliamentary spirit exist side by side. The atmosphere conveyed by its quaint proceedings is easier to reproduce than to describe; so here, by way of introduction, is a literal extract from one of the debates I attended while in the capital.

The new Finance Minister, Mr. Morarji Desai, was making his debut before the Lok Sabha to introduce his first Budget. Mr. Desai, whom I later met, is a Brahmin; and he is as urbane and aloof as these scions of the sacred thread come. Both the urbanity and the aloofness seemed to infuriate his critics, as the following exchange, given in its original near-perfect English, indicates :

Mr. Desai: I know my hon. friend Shri Prabhat Kar or his friends like Shri Nagi Reddy will never believe in what I am believing. He believes in a totalitarian state.

Mr. Nagi Reddy (Communist): Question.

Mr. Desai: No amount of reason or arguments which are raised by them are going to convince me that they believe in any other state.

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Mr. Speaker: We see they have taken to democracy now.

Mr. Desai: It is only the story of the Brahmin and the three thugs who went to the Brahmin. I do not want to be in the position of that Brahmin. . . .

Mr. Speaker: There are only a few more minutes. . . .

Mr. Nath Pai (PSP): In those few minutes, we want you to speak on economics, not on morals.

Mr. Desai: What can I do if they do not want to hear? I know I am annoying my hon. friends. Why should they not be prepared to hear these plain truths?

Mr. Nath Pai: You are amusing, not annoying.

Mr. Desai: If my hon. friends were amused, they would not have made the show they are making. If they are amused, I would see happiness on their faces. I am seeing annoyance on their faces.

Some Opposition members: We are enjoying!

Mr. Desai: They are annoyed. I am enjoying. They are annoyed. I will go on enjoying even if they do not.

Mr. Speaker: There are only seven minutes more. . . .

But even in those remaining seven minutes, Mr. Desai could not be dragged any closer to the point. The banter ran on, and the time ran out.

It was no wonder that, the next day, Delhi's leading Parliamentary Correspondent noted, in his report of the debate: 'The House admired and cheered the repartee with which the Finance Minister floored his adversaries. But few were any the wiser on problems of economic policy when he had finished.' This, incidentally, was India's 'Crisis Budget' of 1958-59, on which the future of

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her Second Five-Year Plan hinged — and with it, perhaps, the economic alignments of free Asia.

Now there are at least two things which are symptomatic about this extract. The first is that incredible intervention of the Speaker who, between intervals of time-keeping, jumps in to deliver his own back-handed slap against the Communists — one of India's Parliamentary parties who supposedly enjoy his strictly impartial protection. The second is the reason behind this intervention, which is suggested by the general tone of the debate. The Speaker intervened, as he often does, because he simply could not resist the temptation to join in the fun himself. And not one of the members present — Congress or Opposition — raised the glaringly obvious point of order, because they all understood that feeling only too well and were quite prepared to accept him for a moment as one of themselves. If he is a Parliamentary deity at all, the Indian Speaker is thus a Greek god, who descends to take part in the games of mortals, rather than a Catholic divinity, dispensing justice in silence from on high.

This brings us to the most charming but most perilous feature of India's Parliaments. They are not Parliaments as such at all so much as debating clubs where you go to score points rather than to make politics. This suits the average Indian member because he loves the cut and thrust of argument for its own sake and, as the above excerpt suggests, is always ready to lend to it a note of personal banter which has nothing whatever to do with the issue on hand. There is, in this, perhaps something of those Socratic traditions of argument handed down by the Mother of Parliaments and the Debating Societies of

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Oxford and Cambridge. But there is something also of the spirit of Lamaist dialectic — abstruse in content and personal in tone — which went up centuries ago from the Ganges Plain to the Roof of the World and then came back again to settle firmly in the marble halls of Delhi.

As far as the Lok Sabha is concerned, this type of debate suits also the political climate, for, ever since Independence, the majority of the Congress Party has been so automatic and so overwhelming as to reduce any vote to a mechanical formality. The Indian politician's love of irrelevancy and his tendency to back away from clear-cut decisions is thus being converted into downright irresponsibility by the party imbalance which surrounds him. The only real opposition in India, until and unless the Communists strengthen their own legal representation, is the stifled opposition within Congress itself. Whether it dissolves, divides or just goes on debating, this particular Lok Sabha can do little to affect the basic pattern of government. And thus India achieves the paradox of launching a Parliamentary democracy without a proper central Parliament.

Yet the dignity of Parliament, as opposed to its power, somehow does not suffer. In the provincial assemblies, where local passions run high and where the dominance of Congress is often challenged, the proceedings anyway have a keener edge. And however picturesque the debate and however varied the political setting, all these assemblies continue to pay their formal tribute to Westminster. In the Parliament of Kerala, for example, a Communist Government could be heard solemnly 'laying motions on the table of the House' and referring to its Congress rivals as 'the honourable members opposite'. As in New Delhi,

the Speaker of this and other provincial Parliaments tends to be a chatty chairman rather than an impassive oracle of procedure. But he is only laughable when he makes himself so, and even then, he can always go back from earth to Olympus when he chooses. The authority of his office — deriving as much from the old symbolism of Imperial rule as from the new symbolism of democratic practice — is immense.

The best example I witnessed of this was not in Trivandrum but in the Madras Assembly. This was an odd institution in itself — combining the functions of a modern legislature and an ancient court of petitions. Petitioners were squatting everywhere, in loin-cloths and with black umbrellas. Even the office of the 'Government Chief Whip' (in English on the door) was besieged by a long line of squatters who had tramped from Pallavaram or Vellore, less on a point of order than because their wife had been stolen or their bullock had disappeared. The official 'peons', each with the bronze badge of his calling on his white robe, tried to keep order as best they could, and to preserve the motion papers from the lemonade. A delicious notice (also in English) requested visitors: '1. To wait on the verandahs until called. 2. Not to peep through office doors and windows.'

The debate itself was going on in the hall downstairs. It was late spring, but despite the heat and the brilliant sunshine, all lights were turned on throughout the session to give a note of solemnity to the proceedings. The Government and Opposition faced each other squarely on the British pattern (unlike in the Lok Sabha, where the parties were grouped in a Continental horse-shoe). Each

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speaker had a microphone in front of him, and into this he spat bursts of Tamil which erupted back in echoes from all corners of the hall. From the ceiling, dozens of fans, suspended on 30-foot poles, whirred at top speed, so that the restless flap of documents held down by paper-weights formed a crackling background to the discussion.

One or two members were fast asleep, their sandals on the ground and their bare black legs curled up beside them on the leather bench. But the majority were engaged in a furious argument over a bill designed to raise the tax levy on horse-racing and cinemas in Madras State. The debate, which was all in Tamil, suddenly got so unruly that even the sleeping members woke up with a snort and a start, like dozers in a train which has jolted to a sudden stop. The Speaker made two or three attempts to intervene, also in Tamil; but his efforts were completely without effect.

He then gave a sign to a figure who stood behind the High Chair, looking like some gorgeous scarab in his coat of Royal blue laced with gold. The scarab, who was in fact the Clerk of the House, thereupon smote a bell which clanged out as brassily as a San Francisco tram. The hubbub died down, and the Speaker stood up to deliver a ten-minute homily in excellent English about the need to observe certain decencies of procedure and to respect the dignity of this democratic Assembly. It was like the head-master suddenly appearing in a rowdy junior classroom. Perhaps it was the bell; perhaps it was the effect of English coming so suddenly after hours of unrelieved Tamil. But, from the moment the Speaker sat down again, the debate was conducted along decorous lines. I even noticed one of the sleepy members furtively slipping on his sandals

again, with the look of a schoolboy caught with a catapult in his hand.

The whole performance, even after this intervention from on high, did not look or sound very much like Westminster. But one could not help feeling that, so long as the Speaker in Madras could go on producing such effects with his tram-bell and his English lectures, Westminster would have nothing much to be ashamed about.

* * *

One of the reasons why many Indian Assemblies—and particularly the Lok Sabha—can afford the luxury of a certain irresponsibility is that the sub-continent itself is geographically too vast and politically too immature to be governed by Parliament, or indeed by any other central representative institution. It is the prestige of Nehru which, in the last analysis, has replaced British power as the ultimate source of authority in the land. This personal nimbus of the 'Panditji' gives the supreme sanction which the Imperial nimbus of Queen Victoria gave nearly a hundred years ago; and, for the rest, all India beneath this mystic sceptre is still administered rather than ruled, exactly as she was in the days of the Queen-Empress. At all levels and in every branch of the administration, British methods and traditions still dominate; it is this, rather than the Chief Whips and Motion Papers of Parliaments, which will ensure that the young state at least grows up on Western lines.

Perhaps the biggest single blessing for India out of all the mixed bag of the Imperial inheritance is the simple fact that Britain left her with a non-political Army. For

it is the armed services — and above everything the military — who really hold free India together. This may sound a paradox, since few nations are so genuinely pacifist as the Indians, and few are so far removed from military dictatorship in the accepted sense. Yet Jawaharlal Nehru, like the Emperor Franz Josef, is, in all times and in all situations, a 'latent despot'. It is the threat of force (and not blue-helmeted police with truncheons but martial law with armoured cars) which keeps the Communist adventure in Kerala within tame constitutional bounds. The same Army secures the Vale of Kashmir and quells a communal riot in Bombay, blockades the Portuguese on the coast and supervises flood relief in the interior. And even more important than the efficiency of this Army has been its unquestioning loyalty to the government of the day — a loyalty based on the British convention (which means even more in India than it does in Britain) that religion and politics do not belong in an officers' mess.

How far this projection of the British military 'ethos' will stabilize itself in India when the last British-trained officers have retired from the scene is, of course, an open question. More than once I have heard Indians working out, with just a touch of anxiety in their voices, how many more ex-Sandhurst Generals they still have left on their own Army List to fill the key posts like that of Chief-of-Staff. The conclusion often arrived at was that the supply might run out at about the same time when death or dotage finally removed Nehru himself from the political field.

There would be something fateful about such a conjunction. For, as long as the Pandit is there, the Indian Army does not need to interfere in the great political and

religious questions of the sub-continent, and would indeed find it exceedingly hard to do so in practice. When he has gone, both the opportunity and the need may arise. If that situation crops up, will the dimly-remembered etiquette of Warminster and Wellington Barracks exercise much restraint on the Indian Brigadiers of the 1970s?

On the Cease-Fire Line in Kashmir, I could see for myself one example of what the fraying of these personal bonds with Britain can mean. When the Line was first drawn in November 1949 after the fighting, a certain camaraderie soon developed between the Indian and Pakistan battalion and brigade commanders who faced each other across the disputed valley. Courtesy visits to rival messes, and other humane and very British inanities like football matches between the two 'enemy' armies, became the order of the day. As often as not, this extraordinary behaviour was based on the fact that the opposing commanders in any given sector had fought side by side in campaigns during the war, or even slept side by side as cadets in England before the war.

With the passing of time, however, these officers were promoted to senior posts and transferred, and their places were gradually filled up by younger men who had only known training in their native Pakistan or India, with all the spirit of isolation and mutual hostility that this implied. The football games stopped and the demarcation line began to look and feel like a real boundary of war. National chauvinism and the Hindu-Moslem strife could begin to bite again because the oil which had coated both these acids had now drained away.

This was not the fleeting impression of an unqualified

judge like myself. The Senior United Nations Military Observer in Kashmir, a sincere and objective Australian General who had been labouring for years at his well-paid but thankless post, confirmed its truth for me. Indeed, he went so far as to voice the gloomy view that 'anything could happen' along the temporary frontier once it was completely under the command of the post-Sandhurst generations. 'Drastic measures' might then be needed.

In an attempt to cheer him up, I recalled that, according to local legend, the Vale of Kashmir had started life many millennia ago as a vast lake named 'Satisar'. Would not one solution be simply to take all the people out and put all the water back? But the Australian was not to be consoled by such fancies. On the contrary, they alarmed him even more. I suspect he had visions of the Indians and the Pakistanis building rival inland fleets to continue their quarrel, with himself and staff scudding in white UNO patrol boats till the end of time from Satisar's shore to shore.

The position in Kashmir is a testimony to the restraining influence of a common Western background, and proof of the dangers of that influence declining. But this is, after all, a war front, charged with communal as well as chauvinistic tension, and cannot be taken as typical for the Indian military of today. By and large, British traditions in the Indian Army have still to be challenged. It is true that Hindi words of command are beginning to reverberate across the barrack squares; but they sound almost indistinguishable from their old English equivalents, simply because it is the same word-mangling with the same intonation which is being barked out by the same drill sergeants. On the personnel side, the last of the

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British officers who remained in India after Independence to rear the new Army, had relinquished his command and left. Yet they lived on in the persons of their Indian pupils and colleagues who, for the time being at least, asked nothing better than to be their faithful reflection.

It is in the Indian Navy, even more than in the Army, that one feels this flattery by imitation most strongly. This is not unfitting. British power first came to India by sea three centuries ago and it was a Naval C-in-C, Vice-Admiral Sir Stephen Carlill, who became the last British officer to hold command in the free India of today. I happened to be present at one or two of the farewell functions given in his honour, and indeed on the occasion of his actual departure from Delhi. The capital is an inconvenient distance from the sea, but the Indian Navy rose nobly to the challenge. A jeep, painted brilliant white, was produced instead of the traditional Admiral's barge, and a dozen INS captains in their immaculate shirts and shorts towed their beloved 'Sir Carlill' on long white guide-ropes into the dingy forecourt of Delhi railway station, which did, indeed, look passably like a departing ironclad with its steam up. I could not see a dry eye when the last salutes were exchanged; yet this display of sentiment was probably the only feature of which the Admiralty would have disapproved. One felt that the whole ceremony had been a pledge as well as a compliment and that the spirit of Hornblower would be riding the spray of the Indian Ocean for many a year to come.

It is only fair after this to record the solitary example of nationalist feeling (bordering on an anti-Western attitude) which I experienced with a senior Indian officer. He was

an Army man and, in his appearance, the very epitome of the Sikh colonel of the Raj: small and quietly fierce, glowing with red tabs, medals and regimental flashes, and, crowning all, a yellow turban which beautifully offset the khaki linen of his summer uniform. We met at 5 A.M. in the hangars of Bombay airport, where he had arrived in a flurry of staff cars and batmen to board the same plane I was catching for the South. He waved aside, with an imperious flick of his leather swagger cane, the porter who attempted to weigh-in his copious baggage. It needed a firm request from the pilot to persuade him to put his bags on the scales, and to step on himself after them. The Aga Khan being weighed in diamonds could not have looked more lordly.

When we got talking on the plane, I soon became aware of an attitude most unusual for a senior Indian officer — resentment over his inferior status in the past. There was a long anecdote about a protest movement he had led during the war against his British Commanding Officer who had objected to his playing Hindi music on the gramophone in the mess. The British officer concerned had probably been tactless and the Sikh well within his rights. But it was still rare to find old incidents like this carried forward with such bitterness into the present. Indeed, despite the pride he obviously took in his British turn-out and accoutrements, the colonel was full of warnings against India leaning too much on old and foreign methods. ‘We must develop our own military traditions, and not just copy yours.’

Belgaum, half-way down the Arabian Sea coast, was as far as he was going by air. From there, he was making

a tour of inspection in the interior which, he hinted, was an affair of some secrecy and importance. I watched him as he made for his waiting car, striding perkily across the softening tarmac (it was by now 8 A.M., and there was already power in the sun). He wobbled slightly as he walked, so that his yellow turban made urgent little parabolas in the shimmering air.

To the right of us were the jungles of Goa, that beleaguered and disputed Portuguese coastal enclave. They were all too familiar to me, since, four years before, I had been evacuated sick through them from Panjim and brought through the Indian blockade to this very airstrip. The blockade was still on, and substantial Indian forces were garrisoned in the flat brown plain which stretched into the interior on our left. Could the Sikh colonel's visit be connected with this delicate affair?

The pilot who had had the slight brush with him at Bombay now joined me to stretch his legs before we continued down to Cochin in the almost empty machine.

'Who is that fierce old boy?' I enquired.

'Him, oh, he's just the Pay Corps Inspector,' was the scornful reply. 'He flies down with us every so often to make sure the Army accountants in these parts are not stealing more than their quota.'

Disturbing though some of the colonel's remarks had been, it was nice to learn that this firebrand stuff was apparently confined to the Auditor-General's Department.

* * *

Second in importance only to the armed forces which Britain trained in India is, of course, the Indian Civil

Service which she left behind — both the physical rump of Indian ICS veterans, and their tradition, which the whole of India's new administration tries to live up to. At the time of my tour, there could not have been many more than 200 Indian ICS old-timers left in harness. Yet I do not think it an exaggeration to say that, without the services of this minute Old Guard of British-trained bureaucrats, the administration of Nehru's India would have faced collapse. Even more than the thousand officials of Lord Curzon's day, these men can claim to have been the 'steel framework' of the sub-continent.

They had been strategically distributed by the Prime Minister with the care of an Admiral posting his precious destroyers to guard a huge and straggling convoy. The manager of the Hindustan aircraft factory in Bangalore — the only such plant in the whole of India — turned out to be an ICS man. (I found him battling against Communist strikers in the name of the Republic with that same patient and incorruptible tenacity which he had probably employed in the service of the King-Emperor against nationalist rioters a generation before.) The key political tasks at the opposite ends of the country were also in the hands of two of his colleagues: the Secretary for Kashmir Affairs in the extreme north, and the Delhi-appointed Chief Secretary of 'Red' Kerala in the extreme south. Both were as proud of the initials 'ICS' on their nameplates as the knighted brewer is of the initials 'KBE' on his visiting card. And, despite the changed times, both were continuing in their old ways. They had plenty of sound information and advice to offer about Kashmiris and Communists respectively; yet, even in these emotional

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hot-beds, they had preserved something of the non-political detachment hammered into them by their Imperial mentors thirty years before. This made them all-Indians, as opposed to local patriots. The odd reflection struck me that perhaps the only all-Indians of India today are those whom the Western connection has placed above regional or racial politics: the officers, technicians and bureaucrats forced by their professional training to regard the country as a whole; and the Anglo-Indians, forced by their mixed blood to belong nowhere, and therefore everywhere.

* * *

It was up in Gangtok, capital of the Indian protectorate of Sikkim, that I stumbled on what is perhaps the most remote and most intriguing stronghold of Whitehall left in the sub-continent. This lovely little state sits on the stone lap of the Himalayas, astride one of the main gateways which link Communist-dominated Tibet with the Ganges Plain and the free Asian world. Even at Bagdogra, the nearest approach airport in India proper, one already steps out onto the fringe of the Mongol world. The bearer who lugs the suitcases from the blistering hot belly of the Dakota has slit eyes almost parallel with his high cheek-bones, and it seems incredible that he should have the same citizenship as that moon-faced Bengali countryman of his who stuffed those suitcases in at Calcutta less than two hours before.

With every bumpy mile that the jeep takes one north, the hand of Tibet becomes plainer. The actual boundary between India and Sikkim is a suspension bridge across the Rangpo River, frail and barely ten feet wide ('One Car or

5 Mules at a time only'). Once over this — after long scrutiny of the special passes needed — the last traces of the West seemed to have fallen behind as though they had given up the pursuit. The broad verges of the road were crammed at intervals with real Tibetans — muleteers from Gyantse and even Lhasa — squatting on the dust-whitened grass among their unharnessed beasts. Though relatively few in number and engaged only in peaceful trade, they were still the sons of Kublai Khan. Even their square immobility was that of the nomad, and the coloured felt-lined knee-boots, the fur-trimmed hats, and the curved daggers in their sash-bands all belonged to a raw universe of wind and motion far away from these lushly quiet foothills.

But this feeling of remoteness was soon dispelled. For, of course, the Raj had gone up this dusty track to Tibet as well in its time, long before the age of aeroplanes and jeeps, and its mark was still here. When we arrived at the terraced capital of Gangtok after the dusty 70-mile climb from Siliguri, three Western symbols stood out straight away like familiar rocks amidst the Mongoloid maelstrom of Lepchas, Bhutanese, Nepalese and Tibetans which swirled through the streets. The first was a member of the Sikkim State Police in British-style tropical khaki uniform, complete with white web belt and gaiters. He was directing the 'traffic' of mule-trains and rickshaws with all the military precision of a drill sergeant on the parade-ground. The second was an advertisement for a well-known laxative, framed by long white Buddhist prayer flags, drooping from poles. The third was a gleaming red-and-white petrol pump of the exact brand which dots the fringes of the London-Brighton road.

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'Its customers were, however, of quite a different order from South Coast excursionists. A line of mules about to start the long, rocky plod up to the Nathu La Pass and into Tibet were 'tanking' one by one into jerrycans strapped to wicker panniers on either side of their sore-rubbed backs. A few days before, they had come down to Gangtok with 'maunds', or 80-lb. bales, of coarse Tibetan wool, stuffed in these same baskets. The nine gallons each of precious petrol which they were now loading up for the return climb would be poured the next evening into the lorries of the Chinese Army garrison in Yatung. The supply was negligible in quantity — between fifty and sixty thousand gallons a year. But the mere sight of this trade going on in this last market-place of the free world made one suddenly feel the hot breath of the Communist dragon right down one's neck.

There was really nothing surprising about these Western touches, for the British Empire had first put its finger on Sikkim some seventy years before, as part of the process of creating a ring of Himalayan buffer-states against Russian penetration. Now, the task of holding this great mountain boundary had passed to the Indian Republic, and Communist Peking rather than Czarist St. Petersburg was the source of danger. But though the defenders had changed as well as the challengers, the role of Sikkim was unaltered, and her administration under an Indian aegis followed the pattern laid down in Gangtok half a century before by Claude White, Charles Bell and other locally famous Political Officers of the Raj. Like Britain, India had taken over the defence and foreign affairs of Sikkim; like Britain, she 'advised' its Maharajah

with a handful of Delhi-appointed Civil Servants. Like Britain, she was now trying to bring this tiny medieval principality gradually into the 20th century with a programme of economic and social development while, at the same time, striving to keep its face turned to the south.

This was but one link in a connected chain of such problems. A similar tussle over similar issues was going on simultaneously in Nepal and Bhutan, which wedge Sikkim in from the West and East respectively. Here are two more feudal countries, peering anxiously at the present from the perspectives of the past and relying, like two monstrous porcupines, on their inaccessibility to save them from harm (Bhutan must be the only sovereign state left in the world which does not possess a single road). The great question-mark was whether India could modernize and stiffen all these backward border areas in the twenty years it would take China to complete her absorption of Tibet and poise herself against the whole Himalayan barrier for the next spring forward.

But in Bhutan and Nepal this contest, though inevitable, was as yet undeclared. In Sikkim, the race was already on. Apart from the wool coming down from the Roof of the World and the petrol going up, those mules also carried on their backs the first rounds to be fired in Asia's great propaganda conflict: glossy brochures produced in Peking singing the praises of the Communist paradise in all the languages of the North-East Frontier, to which India was retorting on a more modest scale with leaflets printed in Calcutta and Kalimpong about her own progress in freedom. It was a haphazard battle: the pamphlets were just stuffed in between the jerrycans and

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the bales of merchandise in the hope that they would survive the 8000-foot climb up that icy ledge, carved out of a sheer rock face, which served as the road from Gangtok to the Tibetan border, and would eventually be passed round the market-places of the target country. Yet this exchange of ideologies was none the less earnest for being improvised. With only 140,000 inhabitants and 2800 square miles of territory, Sikkim is one of the first testing grounds of free Asia in this muffled clash between Peking and Delhi.

To meet this new challenge from the north, the shades of White, Bell and B. J. Gould had found worthy functional successors in Gangtok. The Indian Government's Political Resident at the time of my visit was Apa Pant, a man who combined geniality and sincerity in his own person with a deep reverence for the Buddhist culture which surrounded him. He kindly asked me to stay with him in that comfortable sprawling English home, built by White in the late 19th century, which still served as the Residency buildings; and this experience was memorable in itself.

I have seen few things so utterly incongruous and yet so strangely in harmony with their setting as this faithful reproduction of a large Victorian parsonage dropped down without warning among the temples and rice-beds of Sikkim. The contrasts, though still present, had somehow grown into each other during the three generations they had lived together. Tibetan rugs and Wilton carpets had worn smooth on the same floor; sporting prints and Moghul paintings faded next to each other over the fireplace; pansies and local orchids had blazed and drooped

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for years side by side in the same flower-beds outside. Even the hard tennis court on the terrace below the lawn had somehow got itself snugly wedged into the Sikkimese tree-dahlias and tree-ferns which caressed the wire netting.

One looked down and over the court straight across a deep lunging valley westwards to Kanchenjunga. It was an unforgettable sight at dawn, well worth a damp and chilly vigil in the dew which soaked the bottoms of one's pyjamas. The sun seemed to rise with the sole purpose of lighting up that huge lonely cone of white in the distance; but a few rays managed to fly off in the foreground, picking out the flooded paddy-fields till they glinted like bits of glass stuck into the steep green flanks of Gangtok.

The second key adviser to the Maharajah of Sikkim was the Dewan or Prime Minister, who, like his countryman Pant, was an Indian official appointed by Delhi. By one of those happy coincidences which the traveller in India soon ceases to wonder at, he turned out to have been a fellow student at Cambridge exactly twenty years before and, to me, he still seemed to have one foot in those far-away grey quadrangles.

The drawing-room of his bachelor house was indistinguishable in atmosphere as well as accoutrements from a student's 'digs' — deep armchairs with crumpled covers hitched across the backs like badly-fitting suits; a disarray of English books and papers spread over all the furniture; an elaborate record-player in one corner, with a huge horn and self-designed gadgets to improve the tone; and, in the corner opposite, a black upright piano whose top was covered with annotated sheets of chamber music. He was no mean performer on the violin himself, and when-

ever a visitor could be found to accompany him in a Beethoven or Mozart Sonata, the night air of Sikkim would resound with German *Hausmusik*. After such an evening, one would walk home in the chattering moonlight with a head so full of periwigs and prisms that even the painted wooden temples on the roadside passed by unnoticed.

What the social habits of university did for his home, the mental habits of Whitehall did for his office, which breathed a calm devotion to the deities of routine and precedent. I had barely been ushered into his Prime Ministerial sanctum, the morning after our Beethoven, when he leant forward to enquire with a confidential air:

'Tell me, my dear fellow, do you happen to know of any international regulations governing pillar-boxes?'

The question might have come straight from Lewis Carroll. And it was certainly posed in a setting that would have shattered even the long-suffering Looking-Glass. A file had just been placed on his desk. The folder was marked 'Immediate' in black letters on a red tab, and had various white reference 'flags' pinned inside, also with English legends, to guide the reader through its bulky entrails. It was precisely the sort of document that was going down on the desks of senior Civil Servants the same day throughout the Commonwealth. Yet, here in Gangtok, the clerk who had brought it in wore a Lama-like robe, with prayer-beads where the white collar should have been. Heavy rings pulled at his ears, and grey pig-tails streamed down like waterfalls from under his Tibetan woollen cap. In his outer office, he would alternately tuck up the sleeves of his gown to pound away in English

at a typewriter or, shaking the sleeves down again, take up his pen to deal with the religious affairs of the state in Sikkimese-Tibetan, a monastic tongue for which no typewriters exist.

The Dewan roused me from my contemplation of this strange retainer who was now shuffling away with an empty tea-cup, the untied laces of his black British Army boots trailing across the floor.

'What I mean is,' he pursued, 'are any rules laid down officially about shape, size, colour and so on?'

I could only recall for him the contrasting yellows, greens, browns and blues of Continental post-boxes into whose flapping jaws the mail was fed. If there was an international agreement on the matter, it was surely ignored as heartily as all such agreements.

At this, he picked up a square-edged carved sandalwood cane which he used as a rod of office and slapped it happily on the desk.

'You know, that's a great relief,' he declared. 'That means I can safely give the beggar three months in jail for being a public nuisance.'

The blank look on my face brought him to his feet. We moved out past the guards into the courtyard and stopped before an object behind his Secretariat building which I eventually identified as a pillar-box. The disguise was indeed formidable. It was painted light grey, was tall and elliptical in shape like an expensive Turkish cigarette, and had a curved pagoda mounted on the top.

'This,' he said proudly, 'is the style I've ordered for these things throughout the capital. Quite distinctive, don't you think? But now just look at that' (he pointed

to some half-obliterated streaks of red among the grey). ‘There is a delightful eccentric in Gangtok who yearns after the days when Sikkim was under the British. He insists that Imperial red is the only possible colour for a letter-box and he sneaks out at night with a paint tin to mess up all my efforts. It’s a wonder he doesn’t add “VR” as well, and that is just the sort of angle that had me worried. You see, he might easily have some old ordinance to back him up. I wanted to get the legal position straight before doing anything about it.’

The slim grey pagodas of the pillar-boxes were only one detail of the Dewan’s architectural onslaught against Sikkim. The tiny state is Tibetan in its roots. Its Maharajah is of Tibetan noble stock, with a place in the Pantheon of that unhappy theocracy. Its dress and language are largely Tibetan and its Buddhism is the ‘Mahayana’ or ‘Greater Wheel’ variety, of which the Dalai Lama is the living hub. These roots are too strong to be Indianized, yet, with Communist China installed at Lhasa, they are also too dangerous to be left just straggling. The Dewan’s answer was to ‘Sikkimize’ Sikkim by reviving the old symbols of its temples and its folk-lore as the emblems of its new statehood. The pagoda itself was claimed as ‘native’ because, like the oriel window, it allegedly originated in neighbouring Nepal before moving north to China.

The ornamentation on all of Sikkim’s new public buildings was also ‘native’. This was a sort of Gangtok Baroque: a riot of many-hued wood carvings which shimmered on the walls like iridescent ivy — clusters of grapes, lotus petals, fish, conches, elephants, umbrellas and

eight-spoked holy ‘chokra’ wheels. All the flora and fauna of Hindu and Buddhist allegory, plus some Salvador Dali doodles of the Dewan’s own, were in fact being recruited to remind the Sikkimese, by courtesy of New Delhi, who they were. And the whole thing was essentially a bureaucratic exercise rather than a cultural adventure. ‘I call it “Operation Personality”,’ the Dewan smiled, as we stood on the ruins of a recently demolished building and surveyed the glittering scene around us.

(The building concerned had been designed just before Sikkim had erupted, by decree, into its Baroque glories. With its plain uncorbelled stone and its grapeless pillars, it had looked as out of place among all this synthetic finery as some isolated and unfortunate guest who hadn’t been told it was a fancy-dress party. So down it came — probably the only serviceable house in India to have fallen victim to the pickaxe on purely ‘aesthetic’ grounds.)

India’s plans for Sikkim consisted, of course, of far more than just these architectural capers. New strategic roads and trading routes were being hacked out in all directions from the vast flanks of the Himalayas. Demonstration farms, seed centres and veterinary posts were being established to develop the country’s agriculture. Hydro-electric, forestry and soil preservation schemes were being evolved; cottage industries were being expanded and new schools and hospitals founded. My friend sat at the centre of these activities — in inspiration at least, the Chief Architect, Engineer, Doctor and Farmer of Sikkim as well as its Chief Minister.

He was also, to note a final Western touch, its Chief Distiller. Imported whisky being an expensive rarity, he

had prodded Sikkim into making its own. Lepcha, Bhutia and Nepali laboured long at this strange but congenial task and the result was a square-edged bottle containing a reddish liquid and bearing the legend in English : 'Sikkim Whisky. White Lion brand, for strength and purity'. ('Don't you think the label's rather good, old boy? I designed it myself.') The label may have been all right; but the contents were as fierce as a love potion brewed by Siva the Destroyer.

There was something heartening about that miniature whisky distillery, set up so far from the streams of Speyside on the very borders of Chinese Tibet. It seemed to continue where the Residency tennis court of the British had left off; and perhaps, in generations to come, both the Dewan's whisky bottle and the Resident's tennis net would join the conch and the lotus leaf as 'auspicious native symbols' on Sikkim's pillars.

* * *

I searched diligently, while in India, for some simple document, statement or experience which would bring into focus all these random observations I had noted about the survival of British officialdom in the sub-continent. But I searched in vain; and finally left for Europe reconciled to a series of haphazard jottings under this heading.

It was, of all places, in Belgrade several months later that this lost key dropped into my lap. The Ambassadors accredited there were having a lively discussion with the Jugoslav Government about drawing up a new Order of Protocol, so that their wives might be spared the Dantesque

torments of having a bad 'placement'. In Belgrade, as elsewhere, the inflation of Consulates into Legations and Legations into Embassies had smitten the local Diplomatic Corps like some glandular complaint. The Jugoslavs, like all Communist régimes, yielded nothing in touchiness to the newly promoted missions; and, since their state was a federal one, the area to be touchy about was just as extensive and varied. Hard work had to be done to prevent the Mexican Air Attaché quarrelling with the Chief Engineer of Montenegro as to the order in which they should attack the sucking-pig at a Presidential buffet.

Before tackling the Jugoslav Foreign Office, the envoys had set about studying and comparing their own national rules, and I found myself involved with them one evening in the niceties of international usage. The facts being too complicated to remember, documents were pulled out of dinner jackets and passed round with the port. Thus it was that I suddenly found myself looking at (and invited to comment on) 'The Warrant of Precedence of the Republic of India'. One glance, and I knew that my half-forgotten quest was ended. What I had looked for in vain along the banks of the Ganges and the Hoogly now popped up unbeckoned where the Sava and the Danube meet in muddy turbulence.

Ceremonial may look a footling thing, but it has always seemed to me that, in essence, it touches the very bedrock of a people. For whatever a government proclaims in public about its policies and ideologies, when it begins, so to say, to line the nation up on paper, then it must first commune with its soul. It is like a secret confessional,

Mace and Mess-kit

even if, as with confessionals, there is much about which one can be embarrassed and even ashamed.

If that be true, what a revealing document this was that fell into my hands ! For there, in this neat typewritten copy of India's 'Warrant of Precedence', was displayed the whole wondrous panorama of Raj and Republic, hopelessly and happily interlocked in that most sensitive of all fields — human dignity.

There were thirty-five groups.

In Group Number 1, all by himself, and replacing the Viceroy of old, stands the President, followed at Numbers 2 and 3 by the Vice-President and the Prime Minister, also in solitary splendour. Here at the peak is the new Republic pure, simple and unchallenged.

But the Raj soon crops up. After Number 4 ('Governors and the Sadar-I-Riyasat, Jammu and Kashmir, within their respective charges') come the 'Ex-Governors-General', who are given level pegging with the 'Ex-Presidents' at Number 5.

The Republican might argue at this point that the ex-Governors-General (there is only one who matters) will anyway soon die out and thus the last streak of Imperial red will be wiped off the list.

Far from it. Ranking above the Cabinet Ministers of the Union at Number 8 and the holder of the Republic's 'Bharat Ratna' Order at Number 9, come the Lieutenant-Governors at Number 6 and the Chief Justice at Number 7 (bracketed with our loquacious friend, the Speaker of the Lok Sabha).

The Ambassadors appear at Number 10, only to be promptly blotted out by the smoke of the 17-gun salutes

at Number 11 for 'Indian rulers within their states'. (15, 13, 11 and 9-gun salutes for the lesser princes pepper the lower reaches of the list.)

And, when this first burst of cannon-fire for princely India has died away, the bureaucracy of British India stands revealed in all its plumage. From Group 19 down to Group 35 it is all Curzon, with later India Office accretions.

At 23 are the Chief Justices of the High Courts (followed at 28 by their slightly less fully bewigged colleagues, the Puisne Judges). At 24 come the Attorney-General and the Auditor-General, among a rather mixed batch. At 31, I discovered with a start my host in Gangtok, the 'Political Officer in Sikkim', marching in the rather odd protocol company of the Solicitor-General and the Chairman of the Railway Board.

The final Group 35 was, as might be expected, the largest of the lot — a formidable clump of 'odds and sods'. And it was here that one saw, for the first time, how the 'Establishment' of India was not just content to copy, but was also determined to amplify. For, apart from officials taken over from the old India — the Inspectors-General of Police and the General Managers of Railways — this rear-guard of the nation's glory contained several creations of the modern age. The Director-General of All-India Radio, the Director-General of Civil Aviation, and even (shades of Sir Percy Sillitoe!) the Director of the Intelligence Bureau, had all been given a place at this end of the protocol queue. Group 35 disposed of any doubts that ceremonial in the new India was purely a reluctant tribute to history.

This ‘Warrant of Precedence’ sums up so much that the visitor to India can only sense. It shows, in its crassest form, that worship of the bureaucrat to which I have referred before. It also reveals how this vast and foreign apparatus of British officialdom has come to be taken over as a sort of *ersatz* for the aristocracy who still flourish in some Western states, or for the party hierarchy which pervades all Communist countries. It reflects the three things that the British brought to India, as the Romans brought to Britain: Law, Communications, and Defence. Finally, by omission, it indicates the things the British brought of lesser impact: one of the list’s most interesting features is that it contains no equivalent of the President of the Royal Academy nor even, when one comes to think of it, any opposite number or numbers for the Archbishop of Canterbury. It would seem that, in India, culture and religion are germane to the nation but not to the state. They bind the one, but can destroy the other.

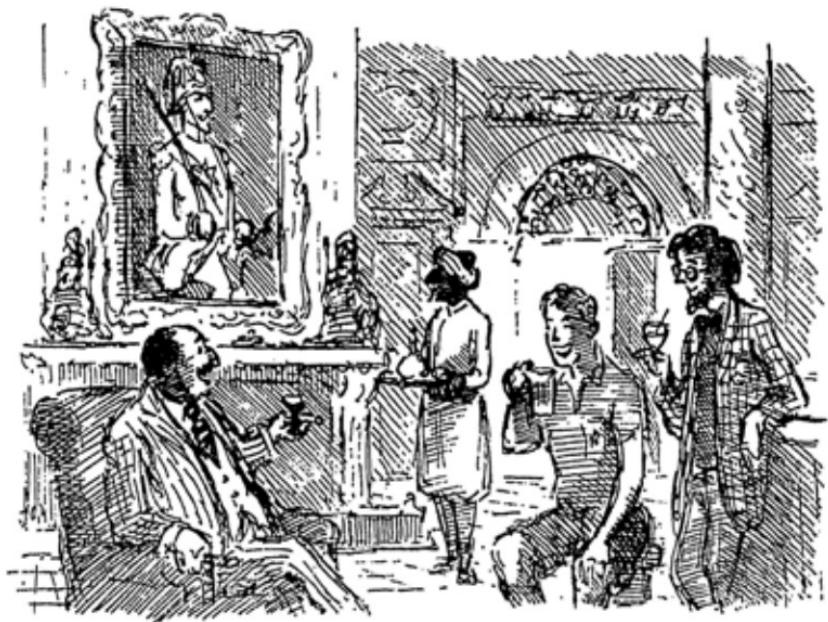
Yet, despite these omissions, it is a splendid array. I found myself picturing them all, from Groups 1 to 35 inclusive, turning out in their correct sequence for some mighty panoramic parade. One or two faces one would recognize: the dignified Mr. Rajendra Prasad at the very head of the procession, followed two paces behind by Mr. Nehru, sniffing at the red rose in the second front button-hole of his jacket; the gloriously irrepressible Mr. Rajagopalachari, hopping about among the Number Fives, trying to find an ex-President to tease; Jaipur and Udaipur, brandishing their polo mallets defiantly among the Elevenses; and then, from there till eternity, the Menons and Mehtas and Singhs of all the Union Ministries, kicking

Where the Lion Trod

up the dust of the Gangetic plain until the far horizon and beyond.

This would be, I thought, a vision no less wondrous than the turn-out at the great 1911 Delhi Durbar of the King-Emperor George V, that last Field of the Cloth of Gold of Imperial India. And the remarkable thing would be how many functions and functionaries had survived the cosmic gap, fifty years and two World Wars later.





9

The Passing of the Burrah Sahib

ONE learns about India from the most improbable people and in the most unlikely conditions. It was a club masseur, for example, who produced the snob's final verdict on the new type of Englishman now inhabiting the sub-continent. Despite his pure Indian blood, he was known only as 'Wally', an affectionate nickname he had probably acquired some time during his thirty years of club service under the Raj. He must have been over seventy; but his eyes were still those of a child while his fingers were still those of a giant. They kneaded and probed me blissfully after a foolhardy game of squash (my first for nearly ten

years), and he talked incessantly as he worked. His table was raised on a short dais, like a cosy operating theatre, in a secluded corner of the dressing-room, and the position lent itself naturally both to observation and to confidences.

Like most aged servants, he eventually got on to the 'old days' and, without any reproach, he proudly recounted the shoulders and legs belonging to aching bodies far more distinguished than mine to which he had once brought relief. As if to point the contrast, two homespun young Englishmen, who looked as if they had just stepped out of an air-cargo freighter (and probably had, for these were frequent transit members), hooted past us, flicking towels at each other's hairy bottoms.

Wally sighed, and the steel embrace of his hands relaxed for a moment's reflection. Then he murmured, as he resumed pressure:

'No burrah sahibs now, just sahibs.'

Distinctly irritated on the air crew's behalf, I asked him whether he thought that only ordinary sahibs were capable of making a noise.

'No, no, it's not just that,' came the hasty reply, 'it's their bodies. I know that you would judge by the way they talk. But, as a masseur, I go by the way they are made. And just *look* at their bodies.'

With that, Wally proceeded to open up for me a new perspective on the human race. It is a common belief, to which all who pay tailors' bills hopefully subscribe, that 'clothes make the man'. But even if this is true, it appears that the reverse of the proposition cannot be accepted. Indeed, seen with a trained eye, human beings when naked apparently split up far more unmistakably into social

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categories than when clad. To illustrate his point, Wally took me ten minutes later on a tour of the yellowing sports photographs of the 1920s and 1930s which were still displayed on the walls. He picked the water-polo teams and other nearly nude groups for preference, and proceeded to indicate the finer points of the players' limbs like a Newmarket trainer inspecting blood-stock. His judgement was not based on any haphazard reflex. He had a precise list of places where hair should never grow on a gentleman, and another list of joints which never protruded among the British upper class.

By the time I had checked the fruits of his half a century's wisdom against the present inhabitants of the dressing-room, I was convinced that, to the expert, class distinctions do in fact begin under the showers. It is not a question of beauty, dignity and virility being on the side of the 'Gentlemen' rather than the 'Players'. Often, the reverse is true. But Wally's rules enabled one to establish the social gulf even between specimens with similarly un-aesthetic physical features. A paunch from port and cigars somehow hangs differently from a paunch from ale and Woodbines. The bow legs of the merchant seaman are ugly in a different way from those bent in the saddle. His identification system I am, alas, unable to disclose.

All this by way of introduction. For what was even more interesting than Wally's researches into the changing anthropology of the British community in India was the fact that he genuinely deplored this 'deterioration'. Was this just the sentimentality of old servants all over the world — the desiccated loyalty of the family butler, the wet-eyed devotion of the officer's faithful batman?

In origin perhaps yes; but in effect something much more. For, in India, a whole people had served the British with a status that varied from that of the feudal serf to that of the feudal High Steward. It would be an affront to the Indians of today to say that they still had this servant mentality. Yet they do continue to look up to the Englishman, or at least to look out for familiar standards of bearing and character, which they are disappointed not to find. And this is not confined to the Wallys of the sub-continent. It is a nation-wide rather than just a domestic-servant attitude partly because the British connection was itself so broadly spread through commerce, industry, planting, shipping, education, science, administration, politics, justice and defence. But partly also it is nation-wide because the Indians, by instinct and nature, are themselves hierarchical animals who are not happy until they have found a king of the jungle to follow.

Their caste system expresses and accentuates this cult of the *elite*. This centuries-old worship of caste has given the Indian a unique sensitivity to appearance and behaviour as an index of human value, coupled with a stern insistence on *noblesse oblige*. The English official of old, like the Brahmin priest, was entitled to respect due to the simple fact of his origin; but part of the bargain was that he behaved accordingly, and stayed on the pedestal where Providence had perched him. The paradox on the personal plane of Anglo-Indian relations today is that, though hardly any Indians hanker after the Raj, many regret the departure of the men who ran the Raj. They would like the old examples in their midst without the old authority; and my impression was that the bulk of the Common-

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wealth Relations officers who now represent Britain in India fell short of these admittedly exacting standards.

There were, of course, distinguished exceptions. But too many of them looked and behaved like suburban white-collared commuters and therefore missed the bus in both directions with their Indian friends. They were not earthy enough to fit in with the Indian Welfare State; yet they were not distinguished enough to be put on pedestals, either in the Ganges Valley, the Thames Valley or anywhere else. Apart from a few exceptional officials and businessmen, England has ceased, in fact, to send its leaders out to India because there is nothing much left to lead. Yet, since India is not a foreign country but a Republican member of the Commonwealth family, England hesitates to send out her purely representative figures because it is difficult to know exactly what is to be represented. This dilemma is really Mr. Nehru's doing, for he created the Commonwealth in its present form. It has woeful effects on the Commonwealth officials themselves who, whatever their personal calibre, are doomed one and all to grope for a new identity. Should they behave like scout-masters or like diplomats in the India of today? The emphasis seemed to be on the latter: 'Of course, we are really just a special sort of Embassy,' I was assured on more than one occasion by our High Commission in New Delhi. In which case it seemed strange that the Foreign Office was only represented in the building by one Counsellor on loan.

As far as I could discover, he seemed to have made a far better impact than most of his colleagues on the Indian official world with which we both had to deal. And I

suspect this was mainly because, for them, he typified a welcome reversion to the type of Englishman who had moved out when the ICS was disbanded. I was told, in this connection, that a widespread sigh of delight and relief had gone up in Calcutta when a series of senior suburban commuters posted there as Deputy High Commissioners was broken by the appointment of a wide-awake British Army general. He had once served as a subaltern in India and, more than a generation later, he somehow managed to combine the dignity of the old Empire with the spirit of the new Commonwealth. Such a reaction to such an appointment may have been what the Communists attack as the 'capitalist lackey mentality' and, as such, socially quite undesirable. But its spontaneity showed, I think, the lead that educated India still expects from Britain, without being able to say so too loudly.

Nor was this yearning for the representative British figure of old confined to the official world. During my travels, I met several heads of famous old British firms who could point to the same phenomenon in their own commercial experience: the Indian staff would not respect and therefore would not willingly work under the different calibre of Englishman who, in many cases, represents the present type of United Kingdom recruit.

I doubt whether this is a permanent feature of the Indian mentality, and I do not claim it is an inspiring one. But it does seem that, for better or for worse, India is stuck with it until she has put down national roots of her own, and has developed the psychological independence which only can come from feeling such roots firmly under her feet. Until then, most of the educational and social

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standards of the country will remain generally Western and specifically British; and the Indian will go on feeling that he is dropping something in his own personal status if that type of Englishman declines which he is accustomed to using as an example.

* * *

From the Commonwealth point of view, it is perhaps a pity that this transformation in the resident British community cannot be offset by a flow of UK tourists. But India, so close emotionally, is too far geographically, and thus the field is left virtually to the Americans. For them, the sub-continent is a natural staging-post on almost any world tour, coming between the pagodas of Bangkok and the Pyramids of Geza; and to the ordinary Indian who lives anywhere near the tourist trek, these American tourists are appearing more and more as the projection of the white man today.

This produces some odd results. The American abroad shows an almost phenomenal patience, earnestness and kindness; yet these particular parties are not the happiest Anglo-Saxon exports to have loose in India. The bewildered natives of Agra, Benares or Fatehpur-Sikri must indeed be slowly coming to the conclusion that the Western World of today consists largely of inhabitants over sixty; almost entirely of women over sixty; and quite exclusively of addicts of prophylactic medicines.

I believe that these global tourists are referred to somewhat unkindly by their own American organizers as the 'Caravans of the Walking Dead'. The standard applicant is the widow of a business executive (consigned to an early

grave by stress, strokes and stomach ulcers) who sets out after his death to try and warm herself at the fires of life — twenty years too late, when mind and body alike are unresponsive to the glow.

Not that there is anything moribund about their appearance or performance. At a time when no younger person in his right senses would voluntarily endure the damp hothouse of the South or the dry oven of the Ganges Plain, there they are, in Madura or Vishnupur, in Chidambaram or Gwalior — sizzling their path through the temples of India and breasting the intense heat with that quiet tenacity of the ageing.

I shall never forget one such party I ran into one stifling afternoon at Patna. The airport there is surely one of the dreariest and most exhausting spots in Asia. It even goes one better than the mills of God, for it grinds both fast and exceeding small. I had arrived, in any case, in a somewhat weakened state. King Mahendra's pilot had flown me down from Nepal and, before embarking at Katmandu, I had rashly asked to fly low over the mountains to take a good look at that masterpiece of Himalayan engineering, the 'Indian Road', which twists right up to the Katmandu Valley from the Gangetic Plain. The result had been a series of swoops and loops in which the Dakota, way off its normal course, had practically licked the dust off the new highway, as it followed the white ribbon downwards over jagged ridges and between narrow ravines.

The heat, the hectic flight and an air-sickness which had just failed to erupt, all combined to produce a state of daze and dizziness in which one could believe anything.

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I was not really surprised, therefore, when I stepped off the scorched tarmac and parted the straw matting curtain which led to the waiting-room, to find myself right on the Yellow Brick Road in the land of the Wizard of Oz. A faded gold carpet stretched, it seemed, into infinity; and on either side ran a herbaceous border of fantastic giant blossoms, all of which were nodding gently in my direction. It was not until I had gone a few steps that I realized the monstrous daffodils were really women wearing flared cotton skirts from Ohio at the bottom and two-tiered pagoda straw hats from Siam at the top. This was, in fact, the colourful contents of an American private charter plane, shaken out for an hour into the two lines of armchairs at the terminal while the machine tanked up outside for the palaces of Jaipur and the Golden Temple of Amritsar.

Having got my bearings, I could now pick out one or two masculine gladioli in the flower-beds — men in iridescent bush shirts, American executives who had somehow survived the rat-race and, with hearts strained but not yet burst, were accompanying their blue-tinted spouses on the tour. They seemed a little embarrassed to be there, as if realizing that their presence was an affront against all the actuarial rules. And most of them kept very quiet too. While the female daffodils chattered away about whether that emerald in Rangoon was glass and whether that water in Calcutta was boiled, they amused themselves in silence. One or two just fingered the cameras, filters and light machines that festooned them, like a Sadhu telling his beads. Others were busy catching up on their pill programme — pills for malaria, pills for heat-fag, pills for

vitamin deficiency, penicillin pills for throat infection, entero-viaform pills for dysentery and, finally, pills to offset the effects of taking so many pills. (I quite panicked one of the pill-takers by telling him casually about those special mosquitoes on the Malabar Coast, two or three bites from which can produce elephantiasis. He had no tablets for foot-swelling with him and promptly struck all travel south of the Godaviri River from his programme.)

But there was one male member of the party who was not only very old but also very active. He carried no cameras and he swallowed no pills. Indeed, he hardly seemed to be taking any interest at all in the tour as such, which he was treating as one long opportunity to project the American way of life. At lunch, he buttonholed an Indian Airlines pilot whose salary, he was pleased to discover and delighted to announce, was far less than what he paid his assistant gardener on Long Island. The pilot took this revelation very well, and the octogenarian was accordingly encouraged to embark on further comparisons. While we all shovelled down our curry in despair or admiration (depending on the viewpoint), he gave an extempore Rotary Club lecture on the world today. The Stars and Stripes were at the top of the flagpole most of the time, but the Indian pennant was hoisted alongside it at the end. He wound up with the shattering sentence: 'Well, I would like to say just this to my Indian friends here in conclusion. I reckon there have been only three really great figures in history—Jesus Christ, your Mahatma Gandhi and our Abraham Lincoln.'

The charter plane took off ten minutes later and pre-

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vented him from delivering any more subtle blows for freedom. But he was still droning on about the Indian Airlines' 'sweated labour' when two of the gladioli propelled him across the soft tarmac and into the plane.

The machine throbbed up into the heat haze and faded away in the sky, heavy with its load of dollars and diabetes. Amritsar braced itself for the shock while Patna Airport slumped back again into its stertorous sleep. I noticed that even the native sweeper had a grin on his face as he cleaned up the waiting-room.

* * *

The mythos of the white man had, of course, died in India long before American charter planes began scouring up the dust of the Ganges Plain. There are various opinions as to when and why it went. Some old hands maintain, for example, that it was not so much the March of Time as the Retreat from Burma which did the trick. Here, they argue, Asia first saw the white man on the run from the coloured man, after campaigns in which he had been physically as well as strategically worsted. After this experience, he could and did come back to India as a helper, a teacher and a friend. But he could never again come back as a demi-god, raised on that strangest of all altars, the altar of pigmentation.

I would not venture to analyse the 'why'; but I have definite views about the 'when'. For India herself it is, of course, Independence Day (January 26), 1947. This may have marked the formal end of the Raj. But the Burrah Sahib himself had quite a few months more to go. Indeed, his last full-dress appearance that I have been able to trace

took place during the communal riots in Calcutta over half a year afterwards.

Hindus and Moslems were murdering each other with all the mass ferocity that the Burrah Sahibs had themselves long predicted; the pavements were slippery with blood and the streets were littered with blazing taxis and overturned tram-cars. Towards the evening of one such day, this black wave of death and hatred moved to a residential area of the city where an English friend of mine was entertaining a few guests to dinner. All were in evening dress, and the atmosphere was not much different from that unruffled calm which had reigned in that same house for all the twenty-five years he had been in residence.

Over the coffee, however, current events did begin to impinge themselves. A lurid glow, as of many torches, played through the curtains from outside. The tinkle of glass was heard, and above it, the dull growl of a thousand voices, like a car climbing slowly in low gear. The mob was, in fact, passing the end of his street and wondering whether to turn in.

With a word of apology, he left his guests and strode out of the house, just as he was and quite alone. Almost by an afterthought, he put down his cigar on an ash-tray in the hall and picked up instead the stick of the dinner-gong. Twiddling this improbable weapon, he marched to the end of the street to its junction with the main thoroughfare. Here the mob were, so to speak, pawing the ground and wondering whether to charge.

I do not know whether a word was spoken, let alone a blow exchanged. But, ten minutes later, he was back again in his drawing-room, the gong-stick was back on its

The Passing of the Burrah Sahib

stand and the mob had moved on to loot and kill a bit farther down. What had done it, of course, was partly surprise: the diamond dress studs, the slim brass staff with its leather pad suddenly appearing in the midst of the holocaust, as if to ask politely whether they could perhaps make a little less noise. But all these were accessories to something else. It was essentially the white face above the dress studs which had saved him, his guests and his house.

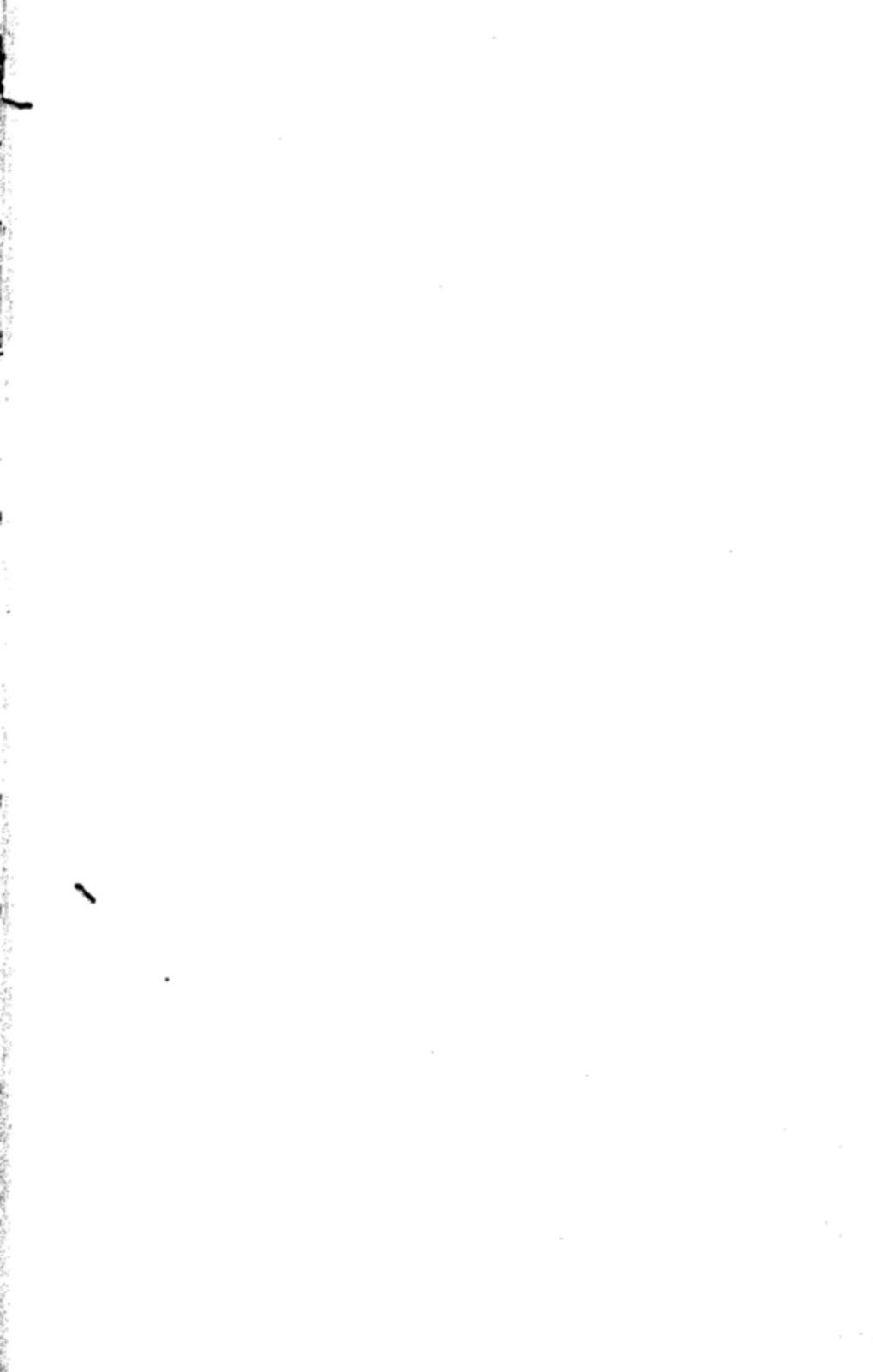
He is a modest man, not given in the slightest to heroics. As he himself admitted to me: 'In the India of today, I would not have gone near that same crowd even inside a Crusader tank.' This is fair comment, for three-inch armour could not give him better protection today than his mere skin did in the India of yesterday.

History has its own arbitrary dates and heroes. But, in my reckoning, that evening stroll of a British businessman marks the last flourish of the white man's supremacy in India, the serene passing of the Burrah Sahib; and, for me, the vanished sceptre of Empire will always be that Calcutta gong-stick.



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